



Government Chief Whip

12 Downing Street, London SW1

9 June 1986

PRIME MINISTER

This note briefly sets out my appreciation of the Government's position as we run up to the next Election. It suggests a course of action to maximise our chances of securing a third term.

Analysis

You have emerged from the most difficult and trying 6 months of your 7 years in office firmly in the saddle. You retain command over the British political scene. Your position as leader of the Party and Prime Minister is as secure as ever.

The content - and perhaps more important - the language and tone of your most recent speeches are signalling to the ranks that you are a resolute but responsive leader who has apparently been fortified rather than weakened by your 1985-86 experience.

The opposition parties have failed to exploit their advantage earlier this year. Moreover, the Labour Party had a bad Whitsun with Kinnock selling the immigration pass in India (and criticising his country abroad), and Healey embracing Gorbachev's nuclear offer. And the SDP/Alliance is now in the toils over defence policy - one of our match winners.

In fact the opposition parties have not really dented our armour since 1983; our troubles have largely been self-inflicted. Unfortunately we remain our own worst enemies.

This brings me to our two major problems:

- i. the Cabinet, which sets a bad example to the troops; and, partly for that reason
- ii. the Parliamentary Party which is not yet serious about winning the Election.

The problem with the Cabinet is not so much its leakiness, although that is to be deplored; it is the propensity of members of the Cabinet to campaign semi-privately (and by the same token semi-publicly) for their own personal preferences in policy and measures. It is one thing (and often a good thing) to rehearse the arguments for and against various options; it is entirely another matter to behave as a string of one-man, single-issue pressure groups, without regard to collective responsibility.

This merely serves to give backbenchers and the media the impression that, far from being a united, purposeful Government, we are a bunch of undisciplined politicians in unco-ordinated competition with each other.

Against this background, the Cabinet cannot be surprised if the Parliamentary Party, especially one of current size and exposure at any future election, is nervous, twitchy and niggly. Instead of uniting behind the Government it feels free - and indeed encouraged - to carp and quibble at every turn. Criticism of our action to deal with Dalyell's motion is an immediate case in point.

This in turn has its impact on our supporters in the country and presents a major problem for the chairman of the party and Conservative Central Office.

We have been through two clearly identified periods over the past 7 years - the first in which the media sought in vain for the U-turn and then the bananaskin era. We are now into a third (and so far unidentified) phase: that of the coded message. So introverted have we become as a Parliamentary Party, and so gossipy with it, that journalists are positively encouraged to believe that nothing is to be taken at face value and that everything has a coded meaning. Gossip feeds on gossip and its retailing and interpretation by the media further dismays our supporters in the country. We need, at Government and Party level, to cut off division at source.

Remedy

In these circumstances I believe that we need as a Government to demonstrate before and during the recess in preparation for the Party conference our appetite for a third successive General Election victory and our total resolve to secure it.

In this we need to be seen to be marching together as a Government and Party.

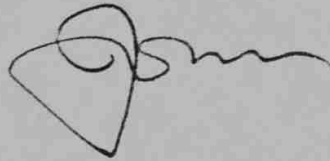
I suggest:

- i. settling once and for all the "Election Cabinet" and Government; making a virtue and strength of the Government's diversity of opinion; it is for consideration whether this should be done immediately before the recess or, as normal, in September;

ii. a meeting of the "Election Cabinet" at which you give the Government its marching orders, including the need for a lead from Cabinet and a requirement to present themselves, both publicly and privately, as a united team which sees winning the next Election not as a narrow political objective but as vital to the national interest;

iii. your chairing of Liaison Committee, say, once a month as a further demonstration of your resolve to gear up for victory at the polls.

I am sure that with this lead from the top there will be a backbench response. My colleagues and I in the Whips Office will certainly strive to secure it, confident that the Parliamentary Party is waiting for a lead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. S. M.', written in a cursive style.A single horizontal line drawn in black ink, extending across the width of the page.