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Liaison CHee
Dec. 81
(with PM 24/3)



NOTE OF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING ON 24 MARCH 1982

Present: Prime Minister
Lord President of the Council
Chairman of the Party
Secretary of State for Scotland
Chief Secretary
Mr Wakeham (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Industry)
Mr Stanley (Minister of State for Housing and Construction)
Mr Cropper (Conservative Research Department)
Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary
Mr Lilley (Conservative Research Department)
Mr True (Conservative Research Department)
Mr Hutt (Conservative Research Department)
Mr Ward (Lord President of the Council's office)

Presentation of policies on law and order

The Committee considered a revised version of the paper on the presentation of policies on law and order. It was noted that the paper would be somewhat overtaken by forthcoming legislation to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The paper should be circulated nonetheless, but should be supplemented as soon as possible by a separate note on the proposals embodied in forthcoming legislation. There should also be a supplementary note on the maximum sentencing powers available to courts, since a recent NOP poll suggested that the public did not fully appreciate the powers that were available. It was agreed that although law and order had proved a difficult issue the Government had an excellent record. The Prime Minister intended to touch on the issue, and its broader implications, in a forthcoming speech at Harrogate.



Presentation of housing policy

2. Introducing his paper, Mr Stanley commented that by the time of the next election perhaps as many as two million people would have benefitted directly from the Government's housing policies. They covered a very wide range; council house purchase, homesteading, shared ownership, the new Exchange Scheme and the Tenants Charter. He was promoting them vigorously. A campaign advertising the Right to Buy had started a few days earlier with advertisements in the press and a short TV film. New leaflets had been produced. The following week, he would be launching the Tenants Exchange Scheme which would similarly be accompanied by a press campaign and letters to all Members of Parliament. In April, subject of course to Parliamentary approval of the relevant Orders, he intended to make the best presentational use of the new rate of Improvement Grants announced in the Budget, and would be announcing the allocation to local authorities of funds in this respect.

3. The following points were made in discussion:

a) The Committee agreed that this was an excellent paper containing much very valuable material. The measures it described should be presented with the maximum possible effort. With the forthcoming local elections in mind, there would be great advantage in arranging a leaflet drop in every constituency, in a week to be decided while the election campaign was running, using the existing leaflet on the Right to Buy.

b) The new Improvement and Insulation Grants were a very worthwhile measure. It would however be desirable if Mr Stanley could examine whether staged payment arrangements could be extended to a wider category of people than those currently eligible.



c) Once the new rates of grant had been approved, and a leaflet was available, there should be another leaflet drop.

d) Conservative council leaders should be alerted to make early bids for funds available in connection with the above scheme. It was noted that Mr Stanley had referred to the scheme in his speech at the Local Government Conference but it would be worthwhile following it up.

e) There were a number of points on which it would be useful for Ministers to have defensive, or explanatory, material not presently contained in the paper. There should be material to explain that housing policy must not be seen in simplistic terms as a housing building effort; attention should be drawn to the number of council houses lying vacant; the cost of entry to home ownership was an area where there was a good story to tell, but there should be some material on the position of the existing owner-occupier who was feeling the effects of higher mortgages and domestic rates.

The paper should be revised, by Conservative Research Department, in the light of the Committee's discussion and the Committee would consider the revised version at its next meeting.

Other business

4. In reviewing likely presentational topics it was agreed that the reaction to the outcome of the Hillhead by-election would inevitably be the main media theme. In the event of a Jenkins victory the Party would need to deal swiftly and convincingly with the position. It was noted that next week would, on present information, see the beginning of industrial action by teachers. On the assumption that this materialised, it would be important for Ministers to have a speaking note on teachers pay [Secretary's note: the DES will issue such a note in the light of the outcome of the Burnham Committee's meeting]. It was noted that the Secretary of State for Education in a forthcoming speech intended to mention the current dispute, and the Prime Minister indicated that she too would seek an opportunity of making the Government position clear.

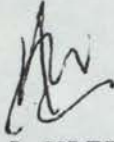
The forthcoming weekend's briefing note by Central Office would deal with defence, and especially Trident. Thereafter, a subsequent note would deal with law and order.



5. There would be advantage, in advance of the trade union conference season, in circulating guidance to Ministers on the Government's employment legislation and new training programme, both of which were bound to attract hostile reactions at conferences. It would be important for the Government's position to be well prepared. The Chairman of the Party undertook to speak to the Secretary of State for Employment about the preparation of such a paper. It was also agreed that there would be value in a paper taking a medium term view of the areas in which the Committee should concentrate its attention; the Chairman of the Party, in consultation with the Lord President of the Council, would arrange the preparation of such a paper.

Next meeting

6. The next meeting of the Committee would be held on 21 April probably at 10.30 am. The main items of business would be consideration of the revised paper on housing; the paper on social security which had already been commissioned; and the paper on the Committee's medium term business.


A WARD
26 March 1982

Distribution: Those present
Secretary of State for Employment

PRESENTATION OF POLICY: HANDLING THE BUDGET

The Treasury has devoted considerable trouble to ensuring as good as possible a reception to each Budget right from the start in 1979. One of the most important aspects of this is the briefing of the Party, particularly backbenchers. Although the techniques used are not in any way novel, an account of them may be of interest in itself and, perhaps more important, may suggest that similar exercises could be undertaken more often in relation to other matters.

The Budget obviously poses many special problems. It embraces several areas of economic policy, a multitude of specific decisions of interest to the country at large or to specialists in the City. The nature of the immediate response it secures is itself a major concern. The accompanying documents - Red Book, Public Spending White Paper and so on - are difficult to digest quickly or, a fortiori, to interpret politically. The politics of what is being done or proposed if often controversial or obscure unless guidance is offered at the same time. Clearly the Budget speech itself enables the Chancellor to do a good deal to set the scene. But it cannot achieve the instant enlightenment needed by, eg, the 50-60 MPs who broadcast this year on the same evening, or many of those who spoke in the Budget debates.

A standard Research Department Brief cannot be prepared in the normal way because of Budget secrecy. The standard official documents cannot be made political enough because of the conventions which, properly enough, determine how they should be written.

Those with very particular interests which they have been pressing on the Government will not normally be given the special treatment needed to reassure them in the welter of confusion which breaks out when the Chancellor sits down.

To get round all this, the following steps were taken:

- (1) The key points of the Budget were summarised in a one page note designed to help all those appearing on radio or TV.
- (2) A full political brief on the Budget was prepared by Treasury special advisers. This brief and the key points were made available to all those MPs going on radio or TV on Tuesday, and through the Whips' office in the usual way.
- (3) A special short note on the aspects of the Budget most relevant to Scotland was made available to all Scottish MPs directly after the Budget speech.
- (4) Briefing on policy towards the charities was made available on a restricted basis to a few senior backbenchers.
- (5) Special steps were taken to explain to Mr Grylls why his Study Group's proposals were not being adopted /including a personal letter from the Chancellor which was handed to him at the end of the speech.

It would be absurd to attribute the Budget's reception to these measures. But it is clear from the response that they were much welcomed, that they helped to ensure a clear consistent response from the Party, and that they may have removed unfounded anxieties about particular issues from a number of minds.

The lesson all this suggests is the advantages to be derived from an active rather than passive approach. Many backbenchers, perhaps the majority, are unlikely to collect let alone study the routine CRD brief which is typically made available in the Whips' office. If they are to be briefed quickly and well and in large numbers, some kind of direct "mail-shot" is essential. Provided it is not undertaken too often and is restricted to major issues, it could help improve the understanding and presentation of policy to a useful extent. Precisely how it is best undertaken is an important but secondary matter. Where Departments have the resources (in particular a special adviser), they may be able to do what is necessary themselves with the assistance of the Whips. In

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other circumstances Central Office may be able to deal with much of the logistics. In both cases consultation with the Whips' office is essential and invaluable.

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