

SUBJECT

*See also
cc memo*



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NOTE OF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING ON 28 JULY 1982

Present: Prime Minister
Lord President of the Council
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Education and Science
Secretary of State for Social Services
Secretary of State for Employment
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister of State, Treasury (Mr Wakeham)
Minister of State for Housing and Construction
(Mr Stanley)
Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary
Mr Cropper, Conservative Research Department (and
Research Department staff)
Mr Ward, Lord President of the Council's office.

Presentation of Housing Policy

The Committee considered the revised paper on the Presentation of Housing Policy. The following points were made in discussion:

- a) It was re-assuring that applications for council house purchases continued to run at a high level; in the first six months of this year a further 100,000 such applications had been made. About 300,000 people had now been involved in the successful purchase of their council houses. There was, therefore, confidence that the scheme had acquired a momentum of its own. There had however been problems, arising out of an industrial dispute, over placing advertisements on the right to buy on commercial television.
- b) This was undoubtedly an area of policy which should be given prominence at the Party Conference. In particular, it remains the case that a number of Authorities not exclusively Labour Authorities, were proceeding more slowly than the Government would wish with processing applications and it would be valuable for the Minister of State for Housing and Construction to discuss with the Party Chairman a letter, and a leaflet, which should be sent to all Conservative Councils urging that the best possible progress be made.



c) It was noted that the forthcoming Conservative Central Office briefing note would deal with this subject.

d) It was interesting that intellectual opposition to the sales of council houses had almost totally collapsed. The Labour Party was on the record as being committed to cancelling the scheme but it was noteworthy that in recent months they had played this theme very low.

The Committee approved the note for distribution to Ministers by the Lord President of the Council.

Presentation of Social Security Policies

The Committee considered the first draft of a guidance note on the Presentation of Social Security Policies. The following points were made in discussion:

a) It was important as the election grew nearer that the Party should avoid any expensive commitments in the area of social security policy and should seek to keep its options for the future open.

b) This was a policy area in which it was presentationally difficult to be pressing for increased personal efforts in the interests of cutting public expenditure. It would be unwise to raise fears about the future of the NHS. In general, one could not expect the private health sector to do more than offer alternative facilities for acute cases; the care of the chronically sick held no attractions to the private sector.

c) On the other hand, a great deal of useful work was done outside the NHS by voluntary agencies and charitable associations, for example in the care of the elderly. The Government should be seen to be keen to cooperate with these voluntary efforts and to encourage them. Local directors of social services should not regard themselves as running large bureaucratic organisations, but as drawing on all the assets that the community could offer.

d) The statement in paragraph 4 of page 1, that proportionately more elderly people were cared for by their families than was the case at the beginning of this century, was remarkable if it could be substantiated.



e) The manpower figures in paragraph 5 on pages 3 and 4 were impressive but could usefully be counter-balanced by a reference to the importance of proper manpower control.

f) Here and there in the paper there were examples of insensitive drafting which, if taken out of context, could be presentationally damaging. Paragraphs 3a and 3b on page 6 were examples. In revising the paper for future consideration by the Committee at its next meeting, care should be taken to amend any such passages.

The Committee agreed that the paper should be revised in the light of their discussion, and re-considered at their next meeting.

Presentation of Education Policies

Introducing the first draft of a guidance note on the Presentation of Education Policies, the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that the paper was generally a review of what had so far been achieved. He would shortly be coming to colleagues with important proposals for future measures especially in the area of parental choice. He would also make proposals in the field of higher education. This meant that the existing paper fell short of anything which might be useful for campaign purposes. In discussion it was noted that here and there were passages where the drafting lacked sensitivity - paragraph 8 on page 2 was an example - and that in revising the paper care should be taken to avoid insensitive drafting, or statements which appeared to lack humanity. There should be a clearer expression of the Government's philosophy to education generally. The Committee agreed to consider the revised draft at their next meeting.

Circulation of Press Releases

The Chief Secretary, Treasury said that he had circulated this note to the Committee in the light of his experience of the operation of the guidelines laid down in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" regarding the distribution of Ministerial speeches. The current regulations precluded use of official machinery for distributing Ministerial speeches made in a Party political context; such material could only be disseminated through Conservative Central Office. In his view, the distinction between Party political, and official, occasions was somewhat artificial. Moreover, he had found that almost invariably better media coverage was achieved when material was circulated through official machinery. He was not arguing for a wholesale change in the arrangements, but he could not see any serious objection to the use of official machinery for circulating Ministerial statements of policy wherever they were delivered.



In discussion, it was accepted that the existing Conservative Central Office arrangements were deficient in that no special priority was given to important Ministerial speeches. Their impact was often lost by the contemporaneous circulation of less important material from backbenchers. It would be presentationally unwise for this Government to be seen to be tinkering with the rules. The emphasis should be placed instead on improving the operation of the Conservative Central Office machinery.

Diary for 1982

The Prime Minister's Press Secretary said that the major political topics for the remainder of the year were likely to be the forthcoming pay round, public expenditure, consultation on industrial relations legislation, and the EC Budget re-negotiation. In discussion, there was general agreement on the importance of keeping away from the concept of an annual pay round, and of discouraging expectations of pay increases unrelated to progress and performance. There was an important message for the Government to get across. On the other hand, the point was made that in general the private sector could be expected to behave responsibly because of the pressures it was under; exhortations from the Government were unlikely to be of significant value to the private sector; and possibly the Government's best contribution would be to demonstrate unequivocally that it had its own-house firmly in order. It would be valuable to have a further discussion on the handling of these topics, and in particular on the orchestration - both as regards message and timing - of keynote speeches by the Prime Minister and senior colleagues.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held in No. 10 Downing Street on Friday 10 September 1982 at 2.30 pm.

A handwritten signature, possibly "A.W.", in dark ink.

Distribution: Those present
Party Chairman