

CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

32 SMITH SQUARE · SW1

MEMORANDUM

Private & Confidential

To Chairman
cc see below

From Peter Cropper

11th January 1984

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EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Following the recent meeting of the Howe Committee, at which it was agreed that a joint meeting with your Campaign Strategy Committee would be a good idea, I thought I had better prepare a note on various problems that affect both groups.

I am not sure how you would like this to develop. Maybe you would like to glance at the attached draft.



cc Deputy Chairman
Tom Arnold MP
John Houston (FCO)

ORGANISATION AND STRATEGY FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

1. Introduction

It is probable that the Conservative Party would be favoured at the forthcoming European Parliament elections by i) a low poll and ii) a campaign fought wholly on European issues. But our opponents are hardly likely to play ball with us on this, and it would be dangerous to think that we could, by resolutely pegging the campaign in a low key, maximise our majority in this way. As the Party in office at home, we are bound to be placed to some extent on the defensive. The challenge to us is to dictate, nonetheless, the terms on which the campaign is fought. To set out to dictate the terms of a positive campaign is incompatible with fighting a low key campaign and hoping for a low poll; this should be recognised from the outset.

2. The Labour Party Approach

The Labour Party will approach the European elections with an erratic and inconsistent record on Europe. Sometimes in favour, sometimes against, its record is not an impressive one. It is therefore to be expected that the Labour Party will in the main use the campaign in order to:

- i) impress the electorate with its new found unity under the leadership of Mr Kinnock;
- ii) attack the Conservative Government's leadership and domestic record;

iii) show its solidarity with European Socialist parties behind a programme of economic re-expansion and full employment.

The Labour Party is unlikely to make much impression with an attack on Mrs Thatcher for neglecting to fight for British interests in Europe. Labour's own pacificism and weakness would prevent such an attack carrying conviction.

3. The Alliance Parties

The Alliance Parties appear to be in deep trouble over selection of candidates, over membership and over finance. Furthermore they will receive a negligible amount of money from the Joint UK Information Fund. To reiterate the strength of their conviction to Europe will hardly impress the British electorate in its present sceptical mood; it is quite difficult to see how the Alliance Parties can pull their act together at all for the June election. The best they can hope for is to gather in a protest vote; the danger from the Alliance point of view is that, on this occasion, the popular protest vote goes to Mr Kinnock as a gesture of goodwill to a new and attractive young personality.

4. Conservative Party Strategy

Thus it falls to the Conservative Party to make the running in this election.

It is up to us to inject some enthusiasm for Europe and the Community into the mind of a suspicious electorate - doubly difficult at a time

complaint. In constructing the framework for a positive election campaign on behalf of our European Parliament candidates, we may find ourselves developing the following themes:

- 1) The Community as a political grouping. Although the EEC is in theory an economic grouping, it has from the outset been viewed, especially by the idealists of France and Germany, as a political organisation. At the present time, when East West relations are tense, and when Anglo American relations have taken a buffeting, the British electorate may well respond to the presentation of the EEC as a defensive political grouping and as a guarantor of West European liberty. Western Europe did not exactly come in and fight on our side in the Falklands, but its friendly neutrality was a lot better than would have been expected in previous eras.

- 2) The Community as a Common Market. The tradition of free trade is an honourable one in British history, and most people have a favourable understanding of the importance of trade to a heavily populated island economy. Thus the portrayal of the EEC as an organisation for creating a free trade area in Europe can be presented in fairly idealistic terms. The fact that New Zealand and Australia have survived the UK entry to Europe without obvious hardship will serve, this time round, to soften the guilty feelings which originally accompanied Britain's turning to Europe in the seventies.

3. The Community as a grouping for external trade. The EEC operates as a single unit in GATT and it can carry very heavy clout in negotiations with, for example, Japan or the USA.
4. The Community as an area of unimpeded travel. The gradual removal of frontier obstacles, together with the Conservative government's abolition of exchange controls, have created a traveller's paradise which is very genuinely appreciated by British people old enough to remember the early post war years.
5. The Community as a democratic alliance. The British people welcome the return of democracy to Spain and Portugal and they can be expected to see the Community, and its enlargement, as a bulwark against both Communism and Dictatorships.

Within the affairs of the Community, the British electorate can be expected to see Mrs Thatcher as a champion of Britain's rights, although we have to be careful that our onslaught on the Common Agricultural Policy does not give rise to anxiety in the minds of farmers and the rural community.

At the level of the Parliament we have to create, out of somewhat scanty raw material, a picture of Conservative MEPs actively lobbying and campaigning on behalf of Britain in Europe. It will not be helpful during the next few months to reveal our doubts about the utility of the elected Parliament, or to winge about the cost of it. The affairs of the Parliament, and the role of its Members, need to be portrayed

in as idealistic light as possible at this time. To put the matter at its lowest, the Conservative Party in the constituencies would not be assisted by the emergence of well financed Labour or Alliance MEPs in a whole lot of Tory areas. But there are better reasons than that for sending good Conservatives to represent us at Strasbourg.

Planning the Publicity Campaign

With a cut off date of April 14th for the use of Joint Information Fund money, publicity for the European Parliament elections will presumably divide into two phases:

First Part - up to April 14th, financed by the Information Fund, promoting the idea of Europe and the European Parliament.

Second Part - after April 14th, financed by the Conservative Party, projecting the political argument for supporting the Conservative Party's candidates.

Time is now very short for planning the first phase of the publicity programme.

Planning the second phase of the publicity programme can only go ahead when the style of the election campaign has been decided. Are people going to be asked to vote for Conservative candidates as a visible endorsement of HMG's negotiating stance in the Council of Ministers? Or as a vote of confidence in the Thatcher government? In order to install a team at Strasbourg which will strive for a more significant role for the Parliament? A less significant role? Is the publicity programme intended to complement an impressive schedule of Ministerial

speeches, press conferences and speaking tours? Or to be free standing? Is it going to be serious minded and essentially informative, or is it intended to needle the opposition parties? Like Saatchis' claret bottle poster and the two page press advertisement describing the miseries of socialism?

These questions need to be considered before instructions can be given either to the advertising agents or to the organs of the Party.

Handling Questions of Policy

The 1984 European Parliament elections will present some novel problems for those concerned with the definition of policy. At a General Election it is quite normal for policy commitments to be made by the leadership during the course of the campaign - for example at the morning press conference. Not everything can be provided for the Manifesto; some 250 explanatory notes on second order policy issues were produced and sent out to candidates by Sir Angus Maude's Questions of Policy Committee last May/June. Once Parliament has been dissolved, the Civil Service takes a back seat and allows the governing party to defend its own record and bid for re-election in whatever way it thinks fit.

In 1984 the campaign will feature a nationally mounted challenge to the party, the conclusion of which will be foregone - i.e. the governing party will remain firmly in power. There will be no dissolution of the Westminster Parliament, and the business of government will carry on as if nothing were happening in the constituencies. The Cabinet will continue to meet, and the Civil Service will expect to be consulted from minute to minute - particularly on sensitive

issues of international affairs such as may be the subject of current negotiations in the Council of Ministers during the very period in which the European Parliament elections are taking place.

Thus answers to questions touching on important matters of policy, whether in domestic or foreign affairs, will have to be prepared by and given with authority. It will not be possible for Ministers to give off-the-cuff answers to questions concerning the affairs of their own departments - let alone to questions outside their own areas of responsibility. And it will be impossible for rulings to be given by the equivalent of an Angus Maude committee, however well informed.

In short, the Questions of Policy operation during the campaign will have to be much more carefully planned and organised than it needs to be at a domestic General Election. At the very least it will have to include Ministers representative of the principal negotiating Departments - FCO, Treasury and Agriculture.

And what of the European Democratic Group, to which the candidates hope to belong?

Is the Secretariat of the EDG expected to rule on policy matters while the MEPs are out on the stump seeking re-election?

Role of Special Advisers


At the recent General Election, the Research Department was augmented by Special Advisers from several government departments. This will

not be so easy for the European Parliament elections. Under the terms of contract, a Special Adviser is expected to resign if he or she "wishes to take part in a general or by-election campaign, or to help in a Party headquarters or research unit during such a campaign". Does this, by extension, include taking part or helping in a European Parliament campaign? If so, will it be to Ministers' liking if their Special Advisers all resign a month before June 14th; will reappointment be guaranteed? Who will pay Special Advisers during this hiatus? It may be more appropriate that the Research Department should this time be augmented from members of the EDG Secretariat where necessary. Or will the Secretariat continue to function at Queen Anne's Gate, servicing Sir Henry Plumb and his deputies?

The Press Conference

If the daily, or thrice-weekly, press conferences are being held at Central Office, and attended by the Prime Minister and/or Government Ministers, how will the EDG be represented? By Sir Henry Plumb each time, and/or subject spokesmen from the Group? And will the main themes be planned well in advance, as they were for the General Election.

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