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EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 1984 - CONSERVATIVE STRATEGY

SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

BACKGROUND

THE CONSERVATIVE MESSAGE

OTHER PARTIES

- LABOUR
- LIBERALS AND SDP

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

A) DEFENSIVE

- Party of the Farmers
- Isolation
- Obstructionism
- HMG/EDG divisions

B) OFFENSIVE

- Labour
 - Divided
 - Insincere
 - Contradictory
 - Track Record
- Alliance
 - Credibility
 - Divisions

POINTS FOR DECISION

- 1) Brussels Summit
- 2) Withholding
- 3) European and Domestic Issues
- 4) Initiatives
- 5) Policy towards the Alliance
- 6) Vote of Confidence

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 1984 - CONSERVATIVE STRATEGY

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To elect as many Conservative candidates as possible.
- 2) To secure a vote of confidence for the Government.
- 3) To secure a vote of confidence for the Government's policy towards the EEC.
- 4) To prevent Labour from using the elections to strengthen Neil Kinnock's leadership and increase party unity.
- 5) To prevent the Alliance from capturing any seats, particularly important in East Anglia, the South and West.

BACKGROUND

Opinion Polls show that the electorate is still largely apathetic about the EEC and volatile in its attitude to membership. Support for membership appears to rise rapidly when the issues are put to the electorate (1975, 1979, 1983), and drops when the Community is in a crisis. The Conservative party is perceived as the most pro-European.

The results of the Brussels Summit will have a fundamental influence on the election. Any decision on withholding if the Parliament refused to release our 1983 refunds would also affect the election climate.

THE CONSERVATIVE MESSAGE

With 60 out of 78 contested seats in the European Parliament, and with our European policy lying between Labour's and the Alliance's, our campaign strategy must to a substantial degree be to defend strongly our record and policies.

- (1) Conservative Policies are Working. Conservative economic policies are working at home and abroad, with improvements in growth, productivity, and in mastering inflation at home. Abroad our policies are widely accepted. The UK and West Germany are leading the Community out of recession.

(ii) Conservatives have Experience and Achievements in Europe. We are the party with a consistent record of commitment to the Community. The Community has benefited Britain (door-step fighting facts on trade, jobs, grants, loans, food prices, etc, will be necessary). Conservatives represent Britain's interests best (our achievements on refunds, negotiations, fisheries).

(iii) The benefits of collective strength

Together with our Community partners we have greater influence in world (Political Co-operation, trade) than on our own. Europe is a bastion of democracy and stability in a dangerous world.

(iv) A Common Market

The potential of the Community is not yet fully realized. European industry must be set free and unnecessary frontier controls and paperwork, and internal barriers to trade must be swept away, transport and financial services should be liberalised. This will help create new jobs by reducing costs to industry and making us competitive on a world scale.

(v) Sense of Purpose

Conservatives know where they want the Community to go. We are the radical party making the Community face up to the needs of the future.
(Specific policies?)

OTHER PARTIES

Labour. Labour need to re-establish themselves as the major opposition to the Conservatives and to bolster Mr Kinnock's leadership with a display of unity. Their principal concern will be to beat the Alliance in the popular vote. They will be concerned to win votes as much as seats.

On European matters they will try to demonstrate that the Conservatives are isolated in Europe and that by contrast they are part of a Europe-wide Socialist brotherhood. They will argue that Conservatives are not tough enough in protecting

British interests in Europe (budget, agriculture, food prices, the fish deal). They will seek to blame any deficiency of the Community on us (bureaucracy, harmonisation etc). They will attack the element of flexibility in our policy on own resources. They will say this shows we are not serious about reform of the CAP.

They will attack us as the 'party of farmers'. They will seek to combine domestic and European issues to mount a major attack on the Government's policies and record. In particular they will raise the deployment of cruise missiles and the 'Euro nuclear debate', employment and workers' rights (stressing our opposition to the Commission's proposals), the handling of the economy (they may come forward with some Euro-interventionist New Deal), the NHS, and local democracy.

The Alliance. The Liberals and SDP will argue that we have never understood the Community and consequently have not been able to secure a good deal for the UK. Withholding is proof of failure of five years diplomacy. They will say that we are permitting the Community to stagnate. Their aims are similar to Labour's - to establish their credibility as the main opposition, to cement the Liberal-SDP leadership in public perception in order to give an impression of unity. They will also introduce domestic issues into the campaign, especially the handling of the economy and Euro-missiles. They will concentrate on about a dozen 'winnable' seats, almost all of them 'marginal' to us.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

We will need to be ready to defend our policies against the attack of Opposition parties, and also to go on to the offensive to exploit their weaknesses, inconsistency and lack of achievement.

A) Defence of Conservative policy

i) Farmers v Consumers: There will be conflicting pressures from the farming community on the one hand and Labour's accusation of 'the party of the farmers'

on the other. We must stress our commitment to the reform of the CAP, while highlighting our record of helping the British farming industry.

ii) Isolation. We can highlight the extent of common ground between ourselves and other like-minded Governments on a wide range of policies (particularly West Germany). But we are vulnerable to the charge of isolation in the European Parliament. We can respond by showing the extensive centre-right co-operation in the Parliament (especially if this secures us our 1983 refunds, as seems possible) and highlight our links with friendly parties (eg joint exercise with Mrs Thatcher/Herr Kohl?, joint statement on broad policy issues).

iii) Obstructionism. We can demonstrate the extent to which short-term policies for reform (which could appear obstructive, particularly if we are withholding) are necessary to implement our commitment to new policies and 'the re-launching of the Community'.

iv) HMG/EDG divergencies: attempts may be made to exploit the past evidence of differences between the EDG and the Government. We can deal with this by pointing to the agreed Manifesto and by clear arrangements, explicitly endorsed by the EDG, for co-ordinating policy statements during the election.

B) ATTACKING THE OPPOSITION

Labour. We can emphasize:

- i) Internal divisions. A substantial minority of the Shadow Cabinet and the NEC are still opposed to membership. Specific issues will also divide them; every attempt should be made to widen the Euro-missiles debate to include unilateralism (their bete-noire of the June 1983 election).
- ii) Insincerity. Labour's post 1983 volte-face on membership can be portrayed as opportunistic. This is their fifth change of mind.
- iii) Contradictions. Labour fought the June 1983 election on the 'Alternative Strategy' for the economy. In June Labour argued that implementation

of the 'Alternative Strategy' required withdrawal from the Community. Why is the same economic strategy now compatible with the Treaty of Rome and membership of the Community when only a year ago it was held to be incompatible?

- iv) Track Record. Labour can be castigated for failure to obtain reform of the Budget or the CAP before 1979, for massive net contributions by 1979, and for a short-sighted re-negotiation in 1975. The attendance and performance of the 17 Labour MEPs has been divided, contradictory, and ineffective. Why should a larger number do better?

The Alliance.

We can emphasize:

- i) Credibility. Alliance policies on Europe can be portrayed as naive and idealistic.
- ii) Divisions. The SDP and Liberal Party are divided over several issues including: Euro-missiles, federalism, nuclear power, who their European allies should be, and candidate selection. It is clear that Labour will concentrate much of their campaign against the Alliance and the best approach may (as in June 1983) be for us to ignore them. On the other hand we are unlikely to lose many 'Euro fanatics' votes by attacking them.

FOR DECISION

1) THE BRUSSELS SUMMIT

If there is limited progress at Brussels, should we seek to stress the positive aspects, or adopt a more nationalistic tone?

2) WITHHOLDING

Should any decision on withholding be governed by electoral considerations?

3) DOMESTIC ISSUES

Is it in our interests to focus largely on European Community questions in the election?

4) INITIATIVES

Should any 'policy' initiatives be made during the campaign either on domestic or other issues? These could for instance take the form of:

- a joint statement on shared beliefs etc with Kohl (a good counter to the charge of isolation, particularly valuable if we are withholding).
- a judiciously timed statement on relations with the USSR; this would draw some of the sting of the Euro-missiles issue (a major plank in Labour's campaign). CND are holding a referendum on Cruise missile deployment outside the polling stations on June 14th.

5) POLICY TOWARDS THE ALLIANCE

Should the Alliance be attacked on proportional representation and/or their line on the veto? Both PR and the veto could expose latent divisions among Conservative MEPs. Should we leave Labour to attack the Alliance on these issues; we could (as in June 1983) largely ignore the Alliance.

6) VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

How much do we want to turn this election into a vote of confidence on the Government and accept opposition attempts to make it so? This will determine campaign style and extent of involvement of the PM and senior ministers.