

21 July 75



Dear Margaret:

A very long time ago, that is, just before the Referendum,

Humphrey Atkins asked me to write down some thoughts about the short term future of politics, & I promised to do so after the Ref:<sup>m</sup>. I have not kept my promise, because I simply did not know what to say, and I am not sure that I know now, because the situation seems to me to be quite unpredictable, and, for us, very difficult.

However, before the Recess, I think there are one or two things wh: I wd: like to put down on paper, if only



as a basis for reflexion during the holidays.

I do not myself believe that the Government's

- present package will work, but its publication has given <sup>back</sup> the Government the initiative wh: it was very quickly losing up to, and including, the Woolwich bye-election. The press has rallied round it, and we have got some stick for neither saying 'yes' nor 'no' to it. This was predictable, but, I am sure, undeserved. We do not believe ~~in~~ it, and therefore, pace the Times, could not support it. But the House of Commons is not simply a debating society, and I myself am convinced that to oppose it would have brought undesirable consequences
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both for the party and the country. It is, quite certainly, better than nothing in the sense that it will have, and indeed has had some effect on international sentiment. We are therefore right to warn of its defects and deficiencies, whilst conceding that, as there is no alternative, it must be given its chance.

So long as this situation continues, the Government neither needs our support, nor has asked for it. I therefore deprecate as undignified, and open to misconstruction attempts to spell out what conditions we should exact if we were asked for it. We should also avoid any



an attempt to throw the Gov<sup>t</sup> out based on an ad hoc alliance in the lobby with the left of the Labour Party. Such an attempt w<sup>d</sup> only be justifiable if (i) the Gov<sup>t</sup> had obviously lost its majority and (ii) we were prepared to fight and win an immediate election. So the present Parliam<sup>t</sup> will lurch and totter on into an unpredictable future.

At any moment, but not predictably, the Gov<sup>t</sup> might be faced with resignations. This might be fatal for it only if a senior Cab<sup>l</sup> Minister resigned, and I see no immediate prospect of <sup>his</sup> ~~it~~ happening. Our immediate policy



must therefore be based on the assumption that we will go into an election at some unpredictable time in the future, and on the present system of election. I do not believe an alliance with the Liberals is possible at the moment, because I do not believe that either we or they could carry a united party with us if we made a deal. There can, however, be no harm in keeping in touch with liberal leaders and making ad hoc arrangements to vote with them on particular issues. A situation might arise in which a Lib: Con: coalition or alliance wd be possible, but in my view only if (a) the Lab: party split and (b) it was

