



Personal

11 Jan 74

HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

My dear Peter:

I have been reflecting on our conversation of yesterday. What follows is as much an attempt to clear my own mind as anything else, and certainly implies no dogmatic assertion of correctness.

I start from the assumption that we are both agreed that, quite apart from the merits of the offer to the miners, there is a constitutional aspect to the existing crisis, which may have been underestimated in our public utterances. If, on the top of Wilberforce, the miners get, or are thought to have got, any substantial advantage which they would not have got but for their determination to bring about industrial chaos by the use of monopoly power, it will, I fear, be thought to establish that any group with a comparable power (and there are several) can obtain more or less what they demand by similar means. The implications for the effective sovereignty of Parliament, and therefore for democracy and representative Government are obvious, and serious, quite apart from economic implications like the effect on counterinflation.

From this point of view it does not greatly matter whether the concession is made by ourselves or by a government replacing us. The only



circumstances in which a concession ought to be made ~~is~~ would be if the miners' demands were recognized as intrinsically reasonable, and the means adopted to enforce them justifiable. The moment for the first seems to me to have passed. I cannot myself recognize the truth of the second.

In these circumstances we are called upon to consider the advisability or otherwise of an immediate election. If I am correct in my analysis of the constitutional dangers inherent in defeat either for ourselves or for a replacement government, the only favourable outcome must be if whatever government is in power manages to sit out the crisis at whatever cost without conceding the constitutional point. From this point of view the result of an election ~~only~~ is material only in so far as it assists or otherwise the capacity of government to sit out the struggle, and emerge with the principle unscathed. This depends on the stability of the majority supporting it ^{in this, or a new, House of Commons.} I gather the polls are in our favour. I cannot assess the importance of this, or the likelihood of their remaining in our favour for the necessary three weeks or more which would have to elapse before polling day, and during which the full hardships of the three



day week would be increasingly experienced. It would take a good deal to convince me that anything short of a cast iron certainty would justify the abandonment of our present, even if precarious, majority.

Consider, for a moment, the arguments on the other side. We should, of course be accused, with some effect, of abandoning our post in a moment of danger. I seem to remember that some such argument was used fairly powerfully against Attlee in 1951. The argument would be supported by two powerful, and independent considerations. Consider the effect on the £1 and our balance of payments of electoral uncertainty, fluctuating opinion polls, and continued crisis. Consider also the effect upon Government in a situation demanding continuous and rapid decisions of the dispersal of Ministers to the constituencies, and the superheated demands upon them of ~~the~~ fifteen hundred candidates under



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pressure from the Press and various organisations of voters.

The result might well be paralysis with intervals of frenzied convulsion.

I do not know how far these considerations counteract

the favourable polls. I rather suspect ~~defeat~~ ^{present} that the answer may depend on the reliability and staunchness of our ^{present} troops in the House of Commons. If they are going to run, it may be that we should go to the country before they do so. But in that event we should have to bear the responsibility of defeat ~~when~~ if it came. The best thing would be if they stood firm. But will they? I rather think that the next week or two may sort out the men from the boys.

I am writing this only to you. But of course show it to any Cab. colleague or tear it up. It will not be used by me in any circumstances.

Yrs