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SAATCHI & SAATCHI GARLAND-COMPTON LTD.

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT

FROM MICHAEL DOBBS

DATE

JANUARY 11th 1983.

TO NORMAN TEBBIT

SECRET

ELECTION PREPARATIONS

This note covers some of the thoughts which the Government and Party should be making for the possibility of a June election. It emphasises two things: a clear timetable, and proper coordination of initiatives.

Timetable

The key to a June election date is the May local elections. A good result then would be an ideal platform for a short general election campaign, a bad result could well delay any election until Spring 1984.

Only 16 weeks remain until the local elections. The timetable is therefore desperately short.

Election Dates

There are several alternatives which should be considered. Any May-June election date would arouse accusations of "cutting and running", and any election called immediately after the local election results would run the danger of being seen to be "sacrificing the national interest for partisan advantage", unless the reasons for calling the election were carefully presented.

The first alternative is to hold the election on the same day as the local elections, May 5. This would remove any danger of the electorate resenting being asked to go to the polls twice within a few weeks. However, it would maximise organisational problems after redistribution, and further maximise the loss of important legislation from a truncated Parliamentary session (which would heighten the accusations of "cutting and running").

I can think of no argument for calling an election before May 5 unless the election date is to be May 5 itself. Otherwise everything would suggest waiting for the May 5 results.

I would think that at least 5 or 6 working days would be required to complete unfinished business before Parliament could be dissolved. I assume that we would look for an election campaign not much longer than the legal minimum - 22 days. The earliest Thursday compatible with this timetable is June 16. June 23 and June 30 are also possibilities, before we start running into the school holiday period. I assume that any date in July would be regarded as too far into the holiday period (although I would have thought a little research would be justified into the old rubric that Conservatives lose most votes in the holiday period).

There are other dates of importance. May 30 is a holiday. June 6 is the first anniversary of the Falklands victory. Unemployment statistics are published on May 6, June 3 and June 30, inflation statistics on May 20 and June 17, industrial production figures on May 18 and June 15, and the CBI monthly reports on May 31 and June 27. No CBI quarterly report is scheduled until August 2.

Thus the sequence of economic statistics leading up to a June 16 election date is industrial output (May 18), RPI (May 20), CBI (May 31), Unemployment (June 3), industrial output (June 15). We miss the June RPI figures by one day (June 17), which might suggest a slight preference for an election date of June 23.

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Clearly more work will have to be done in identifying major items and events during this period. It may be that the balance of payments and sterling balances could be politically sensitive by mid-year.

Coordination of Initiatives

As you saw at Chequers, the Agency is suggesting a series of publicity initiatives aimed at addressing both our major weaknesses and strengths. The same sort of programme should be organised for Government publicity and each Government department. It requires a clear set of priorities, a strict timetable and a coordinator who can make sure it happens. A 16-week campaign of the sort we are contemplating would certainly require close daily initiatives and regular organisation.

The coordinator should be someone of unimpeachable authority. The Liaison Committee, or any committee, cannot properly perform this function. Some "head bashing" would probably be required with recalcitrant Departments. John Biffen might be appropriate, and certainly Cecil would be ideal and would be able to tie the programme into party activities. Whoever is the coordinator, I believe the programme requires the personal backing and authority of the PM, which might suggest having the coordination conducted from within No 10 (Ferdy Mount, John Hoskyns, Gordon Reece?).

In addition, the programme would require administrative support on a day-to-day basis, presumably by someone with communications expertise who can assist and encourage Cabinet Ministers.

The main departments involved are likely to be:

- Treasury - with the Budget and general economy.
- Employment - trade unions and unemployment.
- Defence - defusing the CND challenge.
- DHSS - defending our record on the NHS.
- Environment - council house sales and rates.
- Home Office - Law and order.

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In addition, the Prime Minister will presumably want to be involved in the programme, and indeed would be by far the most important participant in the programme - another reason for ensuring that it is coordinated from within No 10 or with the direct authority of No 10. Cecil also would have a roving brief, as I imagine you would.

M.D.