

10 February 1983

Policy Unit

cc Mr Gow

PRIME MINISTER

CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

As an ancient graduate of the CRD, I thought a few comments on Peter Cropper's report might help.

1. I have met most of his new recruits and seen a certain amount of their work. They are very young, but their briefs are already perfectly competent and it should not take long to train them as:

- (a) an effective Parliamentary briefing service;
- (b) a useful propaganda support team.

Every political party needs both (a) and (b). As a journalist, I have seen again and again how the Liberals and, to a lesser extent, the Labour Party, suffer from the lack of both.

2. But it will be some time before most of them are in a position to help with the formation of policy. There is a shortage of mature policy advice, both in the Research Department and in Ministers' private offices.

3. What the Party sorely lacks now is a permanent cadre of experienced and thoughtful advisers. This is clearly because there is little to tempt an energetic person to stay on into his or her 30s after having gained the experience of political work.

4. Peter would like the Research Department to have a corporate plan. As a start, Cecil has approved the commissioning of a study by a qualified outsider who will report to the CRD Advisory Board. Although it would obviously help if the Department could budget ahead, no department of a political party can remain immune to the ebb and flow of party finances. But I think it is important to maintain and to protect a core of experienced officers - even if that means cutting down the recruitment of young graduates in lean times. A vast bureaucracy is not needed - just 4/5 useful people over 40 who have been around for some time.

It would also be important that these advisers should be genuinely in sympathy with the purposes of the Party (whether in or out of

Government) and should act as a political catalyst and not as a bureaucratic clogging agent.

5. I suggest, therefore, that you might welcome Peter's report and the idea of carrying out a brisk study of what the CRD does and ought to do. In particular, you might ask that the study should investigate:

- (i) how the CRD might attract and retain a small number of experienced advisers;
- (ii) how it could more usefully contribute to policy advice.

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