

PRIME MINISTER

mr

SUNDAY LOBBY

The Sunday Lobby this afternoon was predictably preoccupied with Mr Parkinson. Their objective was clearly to keep the story going. I played a very dead bat.

I do not believe they got a new line out of me but it may be helpful for you, in writing your Conference speech this weekend, to know how the media's mind is working.

First, the good news: Jim Wightman, Daily Telegraph, said that on the basis of his soundings he believed Mr Parkinson was safe, unless there was anything more to come out. I sought to reassure him on this.

Against this background - and today's leading articles in the D/Telegraph (Flag A) and The Guardian (Flag B) - I saw the Lobby who somewhat silkily thought there would be less talk of Victorian values and the family for a bit; wondered if you had played any part in persuading Mr Parkinson to stay with his wife; whether his resignation from the Party chairmanship had anything to do with the affair; whether you would make any reference to Mr Parkinson in your speech on Friday; and whether Mr Parkinson will be in the hall for your speech.

Not having made much headway here, they then explored a broader area, possibly prompted by Robert Carvel's piece in the Standard this evening (Flag C) - namely, that the Government is running into early trouble and that you are running out of luck.

In support of this they cited the recent criticisms by Lord Alport, Matthew Parris and Julian Critchley not to mention Lord Carrington and Mr Pym. I said that those swallows did not necessarily make a summer. They then fired back: but for every one who speaks out there are 10 who feel strongly about the Government but did not feel their self interest was served in being publicly critical.

I therefore inquired what this silent-army was worried about. They said:

1. the "shrill" tone of your "Russian bashing" in speeches in Canada and the United States.

(I said that I did not recognise much new, still less out of character, in what you had said about the nature of the Russian regime or the need for security through strength. But what I did note was that little attention had been paid to a balancing paragraph in the Churchill speech containing the sentence, "We stand ready therefore - if and when the circumstances are right - to talk to the Soviet leadership".);

2. the need for the Government to get its act together and to demonstrate its dynamism and appeal.

(I replied that it did not require a genius to anticipate that in view of the Government's majority, the media and others would be watching the Government like hawks for indolence, arrogance, boredom - especially as it came to office on the business as usual platform - and a tendency to rest on its laurels. Nor was it surprising that the media should have chosen to remedy the lack of opposition. But what I did not accept was that the start to your second Parliament had been as bad as they made out. If Kinnock/Hattersley sharpened up the Opposition it might be rather helpful);

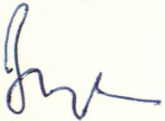
3. the need for radicalism in the annual public expenditure round; otherwise valuable time would be wasted in nibbling at the margins of the problem.

(I made two points:

- the Government had an MTFs which was public property;
- what radical cuts were the British proposing? Silence reigned);

4. the alleged mishandling of the NHS "cuts" (in reply to which I read them a public lecture on the nature of the Government's public expenditure record and the so-called 'cuts' in the Health Service bearing in mind the employment of an additional 55,000 doctors and nurses over the last 4 years).

From all this, it seems clear to me that what the media will be looking for from you next Friday is a speech which conjures inspiration out of the essentially long-term task of rejuvenating Britain; and while acknowledging criticisms, deal so firmly and persuasively with them that Fleet Street is convinced the Government, far from running out of steam or into trouble, will return on October 24 with some zip, bang and purpose.



B. INGHAM

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SHE IS RIGHT

WHEN A SENIOR MEMBER of the Cabinet runs into a private difficulty which overnight becomes public property, a heavy burden immediately falls on the Prime Minister of the day. Characteristically, Mrs THATCHER has decided quickly that Mr CECIL PARKINSON, who was an outstanding chairman of the Conservative party, indeed an architect of her June victory, and is now doing difficult work well in the daunting Department of Trade and Industry shall, notwithstanding his own embarrassment, stay where he is and get on with the job.

In this decision Mrs THATCHER, who reads hearts and minds more sensitively than her critics suppose, has made a sensible assessment. The public mood in respect of Mr PARKINSON will be moved more towards sympathy than censoriousness. So Mrs THATCHER judges; and in making such a judgment she deserves respect and support.

It does not necessarily follow, as some airily suppose, that the whole matter will blow over quickly and be out of mind by the end of the week. We can predict for one thing that some leading members of the Conservative party will quite sincerely express misgivings. Their mood will be described as deeply unhappy. As likely as not they will latch not on to Mr PARKINSON's particular difficulty (which has, after all, ended without a family break-up) but on what has been said since. That is really not, in our view, fundamental.

Furthermore both the Prime Minister and Mr PARKINSON may experience a curious paradox of our times. While in general we like to regard ourselves nowadays as more generous and compassionate towards human frailties to which all are prone, an episode like this is enormously magnified by the tastes and style of the news media (of which we form part). We may be quicker to forgive. We are also more ready to exploit. None can be sure, and certainly Mrs THATCHER cannot be, how far this excitability may carry things beyond the control of natural feeling.

Whichever way these subsidiary issues turn, the hardest and most responsible part in this has fallen to the Prime Minister. Her feelings on family life are pretty well known. Her harshest critics could hardly assail her personal integrity. She has declared her support for Mr PARKINSON and her desire to keep him in her administration. Is anyone else in a very strong position to tell her she is wrong?

14 **THE GUARDIAN****They should
all get
over it**

Mr Cecil Parkinson heard the tabloids rustling outside his door, the perils of rumour beginning to run, and acted with swift dispatch. He has had an affair with his secretary. She expects his baby in January. At one time he said he would marry her. Now he has changed his mind. Mrs Thatcher, forewarned, chimes in with equal dispatch. There is no question of the Secretary for Trade and Industry resigning. He has her full confidence. Yesterday morning, declining further comment or explanation, the minister appeared briefly on his doorstep, wife at his side. "We'll get over it," he said. It is to be hoped that all of them—Mr Parkinson, Mrs Parkinson, Miss Keays, and the baby—do indeed get over it; and that the dispatch of the episode cuts whispering speculation short. Marital trauma (let alone marital breakdown) is a simple fact of British life. One in every three marriages contracted this year will collapse (unless statistics do a somersault). Senior politicians are just as much part of those statistics as anyone else. They fall in and out of love. They have messy private lives. Unless those messes infect their public performance, there is absolutely no reason why the jobs they do, or the careers they seek, should be at risk—any more than scions of industry, directors of national theatres or newspaper proprietors in the same sort of bind.

And yet that is not quite the end of the matter. For why (it may be reasonably asked) should such an essentially private matter be the subject of any public display at all? Why should the Secretary of State find his doorstep cluttered by reporters interested in neither Trade nor Industry? Part of the answer, of course, lies in immutable human nature. The people Downstairs are always fascinated to know what passes behind the closed curtains Upstairs. But there is also a spoonful of old-fashioned humbug in the brew. Western politicians, almost from habit, use a glowing marriage as part of their electoral equipment. Selection conferences—especially Conservative ones—look

for a team rather than an MP. Election addresses customarily feature radiant domestic biographies. The impulse towards an appearance of bliss may be most frenetic in America—where would-be candidates patch over divorces until the campaign is over—but the craving for the externals of conventional respectability also courses through British politics amongst representatives of all parties. And on this surface harmony, moreover, the political moralist builds his or her doctrines: the exaltation of family life, the reverence for Victorian (or other) values, the creation of an aura of normality in which those outside, like one parent families, become an extraneous problem rather than a part of society itself. Much of that moral philosophising has been humbug down the centuries. It was humbug in the Victorian age—when there was quite as much illegitimacy as there is today. It is humbug now. There should be no question of Mr Parkinson resigning (now or later) and Mrs Thatcher's quick gesture of support does her credit. Meanwhile it would be pleasant in future, if only little by little, if politicians could separate the trees from the banana skins and not too ritually try on a set of personal values which, as ordinary human beings, they have scant chance of upholding.

**Mr Kinnock's
marching orders**

The new leader, Mr Kinnock, yesterday embarked on the job Labour should have begun after its election defeat back in 1979: the reappraisal and recreation of its whole popular appeal. Though he has said during this conference that he sees no great need for change in the policies on which Labour fought in June, the speech illustrated his determination to recapture certain powerful political themes which Mrs Thatcher and the Conservatives have succeeded in making their own. Realism, for a start. Labour has been regularly counselled—not least in these columns—that realism must be the cornerstone of its renewed electoral challenge. But Mr Kinnock took the argument a stage further yesterday, contrasting the realism he wants Labour to espouse with the dangerous dreams—the monetarist obsession, the philosophies of Sir Keith Joseph, and the rest—of the Conservative Party. Likewise freedom, of which

Is Maggie's good luck coming to an end?



ON THE Parkinson affair, Neil Kinnock carefully says: "Private matter. Nothing to do with us." Labour must naturally not be seen to be gloating over personal scandal rocking its opponents.

In public, the party took the same pious line when the Profumo affair was hastening the end of the long period of Tory rule 20 years ago. In private, of course, it was and is different.

Whatever their individual feelings about Mr Parkinson's conduct and fate, Labour politicians are highly delighted with further evidence that the Government is apparently becoming accident-prone. When this phenomenon develops it is very often difficult to stop.

It is a case of luck turning and Mrs Thatcher has had a lot of it since becoming Prime Minister. With the Government suffer...g in this

Robert Carvel
Standard Political Editor
Reports from the last day of the Labour Party Conference at Brighton.

way and some prospects at least of a modest Labour revival, the whole political scene could be looking very different by this time next year.

The Prime Minister is probably wrong if she thinks this new scandal will soon be forgotten and that it will not damage the government. It is bound, for one thing, to depress traditional Tories in the constituencies. And it just might mark the turn in the strange political luck cycle.

AS ALWAYS, Labour's conference had to end with the traditional and

moist-eyed singing of the party's doleful Red Flag anthem.

The first words seemed more incongruous than ever. "The People's Flag is deepest red." Well it isn't, is it?

More than 70 per cent of the voters rejected the full-blooded brand of Socialism on offer to them just four months ago. Mr Kinnock knows that the scarlet standard is right out of fashion and that if Labour is to win again the flag will have to be palest pink.

With the conference safely over he will be cautiously kicking away the Left-wing ladder he used for his climb to leadership.

Softly, softly, he will be moving to the Right in the bid to recapture votes from the Social Democrats.

The Brighton jamboree has undoubtedly done Labour a power of good. Delegates arrived full of apprehension and despair. They packed

their bags today with some sense of hope.

They are making a fresh start up under new management even though their policy disarray over defence and the economy is as total as ever.

Celtic charmer Kinnock is turning out to be a bit of a windbag. But his revivalist style has raised morale and he must be an improvement of dear old bumbling Michael Foot. This may soon be showing in the party opinion poll ratings.

Deputy leader Roy Hattersley has incidentally won good marks for not trying to steal the show from his new boss

The Labour faithful, although still looking pretty disorganised go home in better shape. At least there are fewer thinking the party is in terminal decline.

They are also telling themselves that it is becoming the Tories' turn to slip on banana skins.