

PARTY ORGANISATION

(paper by Lord Thorneycroft)

I have prepared the following brief notes on Party Organisation for the benefit of my colleagues. I shall be speaking at the Central Council Meeting at Norwich on 20th March on these topics. The ideas which follow result from some fairly intensive discussion with the National Union, with Central Office Agents and Officials, with Constituency Agents and with Members of Parliament.

1. The Central Office

The Central Office has now been reduced to a fairly simple structure which is working reasonably well. In essence it consists of 4 principal Directors each reporting directly to the Chairman of the Party Organisation.

Mr. Anthony Garner is Director of Organisation. He is principally responsible for assisting the Chairman in designing and maintaining an organisational machine and a campaign plan appropriate for the winning of General Elections. Among his major concerns arising from this responsibility is the recruitment, training, general welfare, career structure and deployment of the Party's Agents.

Mr. Andrew Rowe, as Director of Community Affairs, has particular responsibility for developing Conservative strength among certain priority target groups of voters, including young voters, trade unionists, ethnic minorities, small businessmen and the self-employed.

Mr. Alec Todd, as Director of Publicity, is responsible for central dealings with the press, television and radio, for design and publication services, and for advising the Party on public relations policies and techniques.

Miss Joan Varley is Director of Local Government Organisation. She is responsible for the build-up and state of readiness of the Party's organisational machine for local government elections and for the maintenance of communications with Conservative Councillors. Miss Varley is also Chief Executive with responsibility for the Women's Organisation.

There are also two Deputy Chairmen of the Party, Mr. William Clark and Mr. Angus Maude. Mr. Clark is responsible for control of expenditure as well as for the administration of the building at 32 Smith Square. Mr. Maude is Chairman of the Research Department. Under him Mr. Christopher Patten is Director of the Research Department and Mr. David Knapp is Director of the Conservative Political Centre with responsibility for promoting political discussion and research in the constituencies.

The Chairman of the Conservative International Office is Lady Elles and its Honorary Director is Sir John Peel. The work of the International Office in dealing with the developing scene in Europe is plainly of increasing importance.

Additional to this central structure are the Treasurers - Lord Chelmer, Lord Ashdown and Mr. Alistair McAlpine. I will deal orally with the financial side of our affairs.

I would make the following comments on this structure.

(1) The removal of the Local Government side from the Organisation Department, where it had become almost totally submerged to a new Department, where it can be given far greater prominence was clearly essential. But to be effective in training, briefing and publicity will clearly require some additional finance.

(2) The policy of the Central Office must be to decentralise work to the maximum possible extent to Areas. The Area Offices are much attacked but this is in my judgement largely due to the fact that they have been under used. I have toured them extensively in recent months and I am satisfied that given a proper role and using their existing staff more effectively they can make a far greater contribution to the activities of the Party.

2. The Area Structure

I am indebted to Mr. Reginald Eyre MP for chairing a Working Party originally set up by Mr. Whitelaw and somewhat expanded by me to examine the organisation in the country.

The Committee were unanimous on the nature of the problem. In brief it is that the Conservative Party are in some danger of becoming a country Party. The loss of seats and voters in the urban areas has proceeded at a far faster pace than elsewhere. This cannot be dealt with simply by tackling critical seats in these areas since the steady decay of Conservative support around them is bound to affect the critical seats themselves.

Various proposals have been made. Some want to abolish all the Areas. Some want to increase their numbers (this was the view of a majority of the Eyre Committee). Some want to leave everything as it was in 1970.

Having studied the Eyre Report and consulted widely on it I consider that the following solution must be adopted:

(a) That the number of Areas should be left as it is and only some limited alterations to boundaries should be negotiated.

(b) That the Deputy Central Office Agents should be used much more effectively in many places than they are today. In particular large conurbations should be placed under the general charge of a Deputy. This Deputy would however be responsible to the Area Central Office Agent and would have the full back-up on the Area Office.

(c) The National Union should be encouraged to develop grouping in the voluntary side to match this deployment of professional resources. Thus the Merseyside Metropolitan County needs to think of itself as more of an entity and to discuss its particular problems which plainly differ within the North Western Area from those of Cheshire. It should however remain within the North Western Area and receive

maximum support from that Area. Consideration is being given to the idea of creating posts of Area Vice-Chairman and Deputy Treasurer to concentrate on these urban localities.

(d) The Area Offices need to be encouraged and helped to take far more initiative, among other matters in the presentation and public relations of the Party than has been customary hitherto. They are much too experienced to be treated as a post office between the Central Office and the constituencies.

(e) A campaign for increased membership is being planned and preliminary work can start upon it after the May local Elections. It should reach a point by the time of the Annual Conference at which the Leader can in effect launch it. A special effort needs to be made to recruit members among those sections of the community not usually much in evidence at Association meetings including Trade Union membership.

Shadow Ministers and their Deputies will shortly be asked to let me have dates for slots in an Autumn programme in which it is my purpose to secure in each Area they visit for a two-day tour the maximum publicity and coverage. It will help me generally if Shadow Ministers continue to inform the Central Office of speaking engagements which they are invited to undertake.

3. The Agents

I have now held private meetings with the Agents in every Area except one and I am in the final stages of discussion which should enable me at Norwich to outline the broad lines of approach to a solution of some of the problems in connection with agents:

(a) Central Employment has effectively collapsed. The Party was not rich enough to carry it and the Agents are less mobile than was supposed. I propose to honour the outstanding commitment on Central Employment but to negotiate the centrally employed agents back to constituency employment by individual negotiation with the agent and constituency concerned. As the Agents are negotiated back I shall take the opportunity of a change of employment to fit them or most of them onto the 1976 scale.

(b) I am seeking to arrange and hope to be able to announce a critical seats fund. I would like to keep the actual use of this fund as flexible as possible.

(c) I hope to announce a few peripheral benefits including the Party's contribution to a sickness insurance scheme for Agents and a modest increase in car allowances for Central Office and Deputy Central Office Agents.

I would also say that I have asked the Director of Organisation to prepare a report for me on the Agents profession with particular regard to the career structure and the need to recruit more Agents of suitable calibre for the testing job that lies ahead of them. There is need to concentrate the work of Agents on their executive responsibilities and to detach them gradually from the routine servicing of committees. Committees need increasingly to be serviced by volunteers and Agents need to concentrate on the formation of Branches, the recruitment of members, the training of helpers and the raising of funds.