

Prime Minister.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Chief Whip warned you that Mr  
Ponsonby's mind was turning to the need for  
a change, though he did not mention his  
ambitions with regard to a seat in the Cabinet!  
If you think X is a starter, do you want  
to discuss with the Chairman?

Do you want to have a talk  
with Mr Ponsonby himself?  
16th December, 1980

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My dear Margaret,

I am inflicting this letter on you, as I have become increasingly worried recently by the conclusion that I am not serving the Government as well as I should, and I have decided to set down a few thoughts, so that you might bear my position in mind if and when you want to carry out a re-shuffle.

Basically, I feel I ought to leave D.H.S.S. before long for these reasons:

- (A) My state of health: I have hyper-tension, diagnosed just over a year ago. It is controlled by medication, but this has the effect of slowing me down - indeed it is meant to do so - and I cannot undertake the very long hours which are worked by most of my colleagues. I can still work harder and longer than the average man of my age, but I cannot, for instance, do all-night sittings.
- (B) In the long term I am only interested in being a Minister if it involves substantial power and responsibility. If I were stimulated by Cabinet-level responsibilities I could probably drive myself into harder work despite my health problems. As it is I become very depressed at being only an observer of major events. Probably anyone who has served in a Cabinet would find it difficult to adjust to more junior office.
- (C) The work in D.H.S.S. seems to me profoundly boring. I am sure we have the longest memoranda in Whitehall and the most niggling decisions.
- (D) I am probably the wrong person to be Minister for the Disabled during the International Year of Disabled People. I have told the disablement lobby too many home truths about the economic situation. They consider me unsympathetic, which is not true, but the mud sticks (there are a number of committed socialists in that lobby anxious to discredit me for political reasons).

I could, of course, simply offer you my resignation on "health grounds" or "personal grounds" but I fear that this might be interpreted as representing some dissent on policy. I do not want to give that impression. I support the general trend of Government policy - indeed I would have preferred to see a tougher line on spending cuts and T.U. legislation, but I fear that some Press comment would portray a resignation as a throwback to my Labour past.

Meanwhile .....



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- 2 -

Meanwhile, I am generally quite effective, and I am in considerable demand, as a speaker at Conservative functions around the country, including major Area Conferences. Whatever else happens, I want to continue to help in this way. Were I simply to withdraw to the backbenches I might be less in demand. In my constituency they might also feel let down.

It may be that I should simply "soldier on" and I will do this if you say so. Alternatively, you might like to consider:

(1) A transfer within the Government: obviously I would like to serve in the Cabinet, but, if that is not on, a sideways move into a Department more in the mainstream of the international or economic problems facing Britain.

(2) A role in the Party, rather than the Government: this might well be the best answer, as my strength lies in broad-brush political arguments rather than in mastery of detail. Is there scope for my appointment as a Vice Chairman of the Party overseeing -

(a) our attack on socialism in all its forms, including any new groupings in the "centre" (in particular I think I can be effective in describing to industrialists and businessmen the real dangers of a Michael Foot administration);

(b) the growth of the C.T.U. and, more broadly, the development of a strategy to encourage the de-politicisation of the unions;

(c) our appeal to potential converts from Labour and to groups who have traditionally supported Labour - trade unionists, Council tenants, black people, etc.

In that event, I should try to find one or more non-executive directorships, or consultancies, to supplement my Parliamentary salary. I could then do a great deal of speaking/writing/broadcasting on behalf of the Conservative Party, particularly on the themes mentioned above. My health would, I believe, allow me to work quite hard at all this, as I would be better able to pace myself if I were freed from the pressures of Departmental work.

Needless .....



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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- 3 -

Needless to say, I should welcome a discussion with you at any time you wish, but I felt it might be helpful to set out the problem on paper.

Very best wishes for Christmas and 1981.

*Yours ever,*  
*Reg*  
Reg Prentice

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,  
Prime Minister.