

Box.

18th September, 1980

Thank you so much for your letter of 11th September, with which you enclosed a letter which you had received from our Ambassador in Bangkok.

I have shown this to the Prime Minister.

IAN GOW

The Honourable Adam Butler, M.P.
House of Commons,
Westminster, London SW1

From: The Hon. Adam Butler, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

1
Dear Ian,
Sept 11, 1980.

You will see from the attached that Peterripp has asked me to act as post office. It is an interesting note on the conversation with Lee Kuan Yew, and Margaret will like to see it.

Yours ever
Adam.

Ian G. L. M.P.

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL



BRITISH EMBASSY,
BANGKOK.

4 September 1980

The Hon Adam Butler MP
Department of Industry
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
LONDON SW1E 6RB

Dear Adam,

I had half-an-hour with Lee Kuan Yew yesterday, when he was passing through on his way to the Regional Heads of Commonwealth countries meeting in Delhi. In the context of Mrs Thatcher's invitation to Lee to participate in the Conservative Party Conference (about which Anthony Royle had spoken to me in London), we discussed the present situation in the UK.

--- I enclose a note of our conversation, which I would like Mrs Thatcher to see. I am sending it to you, since you were Mrs Thatcher's Private Secretary when she came through Singapore in 1976 and accompanied her to call on Lee then.

I hope you do not mind my using you as a "channel". I think you will be interested in Lee's views.

Yours ever,
Peter

Peter Tripp

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL



NOTES ON A CONVERSATION WITH ME LEE KUAN YEW IN
BANGKOK ON 3 SEPTEMBER 1980

1. After explaining why he had felt unable to accept the invitation to attend the Conservative Party Conference (about which I am writing separately to Sir Anthony Royle), Lee then went on to give his views on the present situation in the UK.

2. He said that the problems confronting Mrs Thatcher were very daunting. "Indeed", he commented, "if I were in Mrs Thatcher's place, I wonder whether I would even want to tackle them". I took him up sharply on this, reminding him of his conversation with Mrs Thatcher in Singapore in 1976. On that occasion Mrs Thatcher had commented to me how depressing Lee Kuan Yew had seemed. My reply then was that Lee had enormous problems but did not sit down and wring his hands, but went out and tackled the problems - with spectacularly successful results! I went on to comment to him that I did not really take what he had just said at its face value. Lee grinned and said that the point he was trying to make was that Britain's problems were of a long-standing nature. They had been created over a period of years and had become accumulatively worse because of a lack of will by successive governments to tell the people the truth about the situation. The whole ethos engendered by the Labour Party in Britain had sapped British will to work and their traditional pride in a job well done. To reverse this trend required an enormous and sustained effort.

3. Lee went on to say that "monetarism" was not enough. It was no good "sprinkling excellent ideas and intentions from the top". What was required was an effort from below, to regenerate in the British a desire to work. I remarked that this was, I was sure, part of the Government's strategy. But things had gone so far that a start had to be made at once and this was what Mrs Thatcher had done. I quite agreed that many of the ills affecting Britain today would have to be tackled at the grass roots. I had said as much to friends in the Conservative Party.

/4.



4. Lee continued that it was, for instance, remarkable and deplorable that British car manufacturers and steel-makers could not compete with their German and Japanese counterparts because they had insufficient pride in their work. Workers in Japanese car factories did not need to have their work "checked" by supervisors to see what faults needed to be corrected: their pride in their work ensured that any job they sent on to the next man was as perfect as they could make it. I reminded Mr Lee that Britain traditionally had had a reputation for the excellence of its products: many of our manufacturers, certainly up to the war, had been criticised because they were made to last and did not, like so many manufacturers of today, have a "built-in obsolescence".

5. Turning to the likelihood of Mrs Thatcher's policies succeeding, Lee said he had been very impressed by the way in which the Prime Minister had kept her nerve. It would be a long haul, however, and for her policies to succeed, the people of Britain would have to be convinced, not only that the course she was following was right, but that there was a good chance of success at the end. I remarked that many of the people I had met in Britain this summer had expressed their support for Mrs Thatcher as being "the first Prime Minister who told us the truth". Lee agreed, but said that this was probably not sufficient in the long run to carry the majority of the people with the Conservative Party. This was especially so in the face of "siren voices" from the Left offering soft options. In this connection, it was perhaps unfortunate that Britain was so successfully exploiting North Sea oil. This might well prove to be a feather-bed rather than a springboard. I remarked that there was, as I had pointed out to friends in Britain, a difficult question of timing. If, as we expected, the Government's policies began to show that they were succeeding, well and good. But the timing might not be in the Conservatives' favour, in relation to the next Election. Lee agreed and said that already a year-and-a-half had passed and, on the best estimate, Mrs Thatcher's policies would takelonger to be seen to be succeeding than the remaining time before the run-up to the next General Election. It was fortunate that the Labour Party was in such disarray, but it was not too early to



be thinking in terms of mobilising "grass root" support. I remarked that I shared this view.

6. Before turning to Thailand and South-East Asian problems, Mr Lee commented that in addition to having the right policies, it was necessary to explain these policies and convince the electorate that, whatever the current short-term disadvantages and hardships, the country was set on the right course. He thought the Government should be doing more in this respect.