



10 DOWNING STREET

29 June 1979

Prof. Hugh Thomas  
Centre for Policy Studies  
8 Wilfred Street  
LONDON SW1

Dear Hugh,

SWINTON LECTURE

One or two further thoughts:

1. I am not sure whether on page 19 we make quite enough of the "inevitability of capitalism", to use the Prime Minister's words when we were discussing it with her. I think we do need to drive home the point that the march of history, as regards human emancipation, the attainment of material plenty (the precondition for "to each according to his need") and the ending or arrival of tyranny, is absolutely contradicting Marx's prophesies. I think we have continually to rub the collective nose of the intelligentsia in this uncomfortable fact.

2. I wonder if we can make more of the tragic irrelevance of the trade unions. A world full of problems and human suffering - boat people, energy shortages, slums surviving on our own doorsteps, short-staffed hospitals. So much to do, so many problems to solve. But all the unions do is to strike, walk out, go slow, work to rule, black, resist new inventions. And the ruthless defence of their own monopoly powers wherever they apply. The truth is that the post-war achievements of the trade unions are a matter for shame, not pride. This links to the point that Alan Howarth makes on page 4 and the bottom of page 5, the "collectivisation of conscience". The unions' bargain with society is that their members should pick up all the fruits of progress and success of that society, but will politely contract out of any of the accompanying problems. They want most of the good news for themselves, and none of the bad. They want things to get better but refuse to make any contribution to that end. Instead, they threaten to tear the place to pieces if things do not get better. Their position is not simply amoral, but juvenile.


These things must of course be said in the Prime Ministerial tones used in your speech, but they do need saying. Shame is a very important part of our message about the unions.

3. It might be worth stressing how fatally damaging the TUC-Labour link has been. Thinking about the utter futility of modern union behaviour keeps bringing one back to that central point. If the Tories criticise the unions it is seen as a Party political attack. If Labour criticises them, it is seen as a betrayal of their comrades.

4. Another startling statistic which might come in somewhere is on Alan's note, the middle of page 3, on ruling the empire with 75,000 civil servants and now screwing up the United Kingdom with three-quarters of a million.

As you know, I think that your draft reads extremely well as it stands. With the exception of the first points above, the moral aspects of the trade unions, I regard the above points as only optional extras, not important missing pieces.

I am sending copies of this letter to Ian Gow and Alan Howarth.

*Yours ever*  


JOHN HOSKYNS