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PRIME MINISTER - INT - ROBERT SHEPHERD - 14 APRIL 1989

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MRS THATCHER,

IN LONDON, ON FRIDAY, 14 APRIL 1989

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT SHEPHERD

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PRIME MINISTER:

.... watching this remarkable man who had the double, which is rare in politics, although you find it in a few people, an enormous capacity of expressing himself with clarity and strength and in an arresting way, both in the written word and in the spoken word, and that is the double.

And it is quite outstanding, people get it in different ways; Winston had it, Harold MacMillan had it, and yet they all worked differently.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

I know how Ian MacLeod worked to get his ideas and to get his decisions. He worked very much by discussing them with a group of people of ideas who discussed freely, and then he would gather up the views and kind of draw conclusions from them. And I had the impression that he did it far more that way than by sitting down with a damp towel round his head.

And I have a good deal of sympathy with that and maybe I learned a lot of that from him, being one of the younger people in that group, that I did learn that you frequently get the ideas from the interplay of the idea with a personality and not just by reading in a personless atmosphere.

And that was one of my very very vivid impressions of Ian, this clarity of expression and being able therefore to pick out the wheat from the chaff, as we would say. You have got the basic idea and you eliminated the irrelevant matter. Very very prominent, Ian's thinking.

I remember him as Minister of Health, it was before I was in the House because he was just a great politician too in those days, and of course it was very very cruel, it was while he was Minister of Health that Eve, who was such a fantastic partner in the whole relationship, and such a perceptive, shrewd politician herself, just happened to get polio during that time. And I think her enormous courage, and as you know Ian was often in pain as well, really were very striking both of them, this fantastic courage.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

And if I might say so, the total dedication, it really was. Ian was a born politician and he loved it.

I had the great privilege of working with him, especially when we were working on Finance Bills and again his capacity to get a group together and to delegate to them and it was exciting because this was how I learned to work on a Finance Bill, we met every morning, we looked at the days following, and we decided who was in charge of the amendments, who was going to move them, what advice we needed. And it was exciting, and you were happy to be totally dedicated to this immediate task.

In those days we used to take, there was no such thing as going upstairs into a Committee on those things, we used to take most of it on the floor of the House and he always knew how to draw in people who had a particular speciality. In those days, Finance Bills, you had the central group working on them, and you were in opposition, but you could draw on a very wide range of experience in the House, you would have someone who knew ship-building, you would have someone who knew industry, you would have someone who knew the financial markets, someone who knew the commodity markets. We could always draw in a group of people who knew it.

I sometimes feared that we may not be able to do that but I learned how to do that with Ian.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

The third thing I just want to say, you will just have to sort it out, is that his politics did have a great philosophical basis. Now I claim that all great politicians who endure have a philosophical basis, he did have that philosophical basis and it came out in a considerable number of his speeches.

It also might have come out in a different way perhaps from the one, I think so many people are saying: "Oh he belonged to this post-war consensus". Ian was deeper than that, he really was. If you look at one of the early One Nation documents, and I cannot lay my hand on it, you will find something which says, not the deepest philosophy but a very fundamental appreciation of it, you will find something, because I have looked it out since I have been here, which says, early fifties, that you really have to have policies which can create wealth before you can do as much as you want to do about helping other people and distributing it to further your objectives.

And in that, because it was after the first period of socialism, he said: "It is quite clear that from socialism policies have gone much too far towards distribution and ignored the absolute vital necessity of the creation of wealth". And therefore, by implication, that you can never in any of your, and I learned this from Ian, any of your policies, ignore the fact that it is human beings who are your instrument. And unless you bring out the very best in them and have policies which keep down the very worst in them, you will not get the best kind of way of life, the best kind of community.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

Because life is a community, a society is a concept, but a community is a real and living thing and you make your community live by the way in which you react, by the way in which you treat one another and by the things. The only way in which government can carry out its policy is through the individuals.

That is the deeper philosophical account, and you will see that coming out in the One Nation quite early.

Now the other thing is that when we were working up to, we had been in power until 1964, when we were coming up to the 1970 election we did have our Study Groups, we were all passionately involved in them. I know that I carried out a number of different portfolios myself but we did meet and my goodness me so did I, I learnt to do it later, before the 1979.

But it was not getting a miscellaneous collection of policies, it was getting a cohesive view. And if you remember, we were called Selsden Man because you go back to look at that period, and if you remember, they had, I can only put it this way, they had a passion about them to get Britain right, a real passion, because we knew that we were not living up to this enormous potential.

And Ian was very much a man of political passion. Some people said: "You know you have to use all the technology and bring Britain into the technological". Below that passion, below that desire to get Britain with the latest technology, getting rid of restrictive practices and so on, and dealing with the unions, was the passion that Britain was not living up to the character which were her people.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

And that character, as you know, is a character of initiative. British people did not have to be told what to do, they had their own self-starters. And that really informed the Selwyn Selwyn and was really why we came in with policies in which we all fundamentally believed.

Now of course I think had Ian lived I think we might never have made the U-turn because it was a passion and he had much more experience than those of us who, but it was a tragedy that we made that U-turn and I think that had Ian lived we would not, because of the passion which informed the policy and the colossal ability to communicate.

Now you then go back to this period which was 1963. It was a double, a triple tragedy. First in a way that we lost Ian MacLeod, who was undoubtedly a very great politician, through an illness. I think you know that had he ridden the illness out well things might have been different.

But equally I must say that 1963, a year to an election, I think too that had we not had the split in the party, I think we would have won in 1964. Because Alec Douglas-Home is a very great man, if I might put it this way, one of the most classless men I have ever come across. By the time you are the 14th Earl of Home you are not interested in anything except people, you have got all the rest, you know that it is people that make the world go round and you are interested in them, each of them. My goodness me he was.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

When I was passionate about the lot of widowed mothers, Alec was interested, he was interested in each person for what they were and not who their father was, their background, what position they held at all. And he was a marvellous person, absolutely marvellous and I felt if we had not had that split, and I must say to you that first I felt it was a pity that Harold gave up when had he ridden out the illness he would not have needed a second, but having given up, Alec was a marvellous person and if we had not had the split we would have got through and never had that period from 1964 - 1970.

And thirdly, I did not understand, knowing that it is your cause that matters more than anything else, why, if I might put it, our two greatest, different, exponents of politics in the top rank of politics: one, Ian, with the philosophy and the expression and the shrewdness and the instinct, and the other Enoch, this colossal brain, this analytical thing, but also intellectual beliefs in politics, equally passionately held but it did not come out, his passion was a dispassionate passion. Do you understand? I found I did not understand why these two, both of whom I greatly admired, withheld their fantastic talents and abilities from a person like Alec Douglas-Home, whom as one human being to another, one could not help but admire for his depths, for his quality of service.

I understood the technicalities. What worried me was that in going that way, if there was a constitutional nicety, I thought I had got the one and not the other one, though it was what I thought was a constitutional nicety of assuming the result of a by-election.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

You see when he was asked to form a government it was clear that we could not have a Prime Minister in the Lords, people would not have accepted that, and therefore it had to assume that he would win that by-election, and I was very worried about whether you really were entitled to make that assumption.

But all right, very shortly afterwards, it ceased to be a question of whether he would win, and he won. And it seemed from that time we pulled together because if you believe in a cause, you will win it. That I am afraid is a criticism but I happen to believe it.

The other period I remember was what was called the Left-Wing period, was his period as Colonial Secretary, but I would not call it myself the Left-Wing period, it was I think a very practical realisation that there was no way in which Britain could defend, administer, the many different colonial territories that we had.

So it was not a question of whether they would have done better with a few more years of administration or not, we could not do it, and therefore we had to do the level best we can. Mercifully we had, our great system was that we taught sound administration to the people, unlike some others, we taught the rule of law, which they might never have known. Sound administration, a rule of law and education are three things upon which we had already embarked and therefore we had in fact to come to, to bring them forward as fast as we could to an independence on the very best standards.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

And that meant, I think, many of the policies, practical policies which I pursued, I did not see it as much as a practical thing but also bearing in mind the fundamentally, we had, we were the sort of people who taught good administration.

We were not a bureaucratic people. I remember, forever will I remember, there were only about 400 people in the Sudan Civil Service, administering Sudan, and yet far fewer in India although India by that time had come to independence and showed that it could be done.

And we had some very very difficult things, in Kenya and the Mau Mau, I remember very very much, and of course the history of Uganda has not exactly been one which lends distinction to freedom from colonialism.

But it was a practical thing which recognised that we could not, however much that we would have wished to have taken it in slower time, that was not the world that we were living in. And indeed we had deprived ourselves of the very resources which enabled us to win the Great War. We had, by winning, putting everything in the defence of freedom, we had deprived ourselves of those very great resources.

And we had steadily to go on then to accept that and then to start much later, it did not come on from that, we went through a period of great pessimism which again I think would not have happened had I been there, and so it took us a very long time.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

It was left really to my time to have enough, to have perhaps just a little bit of the spark which could be fanned into a flame, which I learned from Ian, and also from Alec, Alec was a very deep person whose whole viewpoint was informed by his deep Christianity.

And so in a way we brought to fruition I think so many of the things which we set out to do, and upon which we embarked in 1970, and of which a goodly measure was due to Ian.

Now that is how I feel. I think I got most of it in as to how I can help you.

INTERVIEWER:

I think you have, it was an extremely full first answer Prime Minister, extremely helpful. There are, naturally, a couple of points I would like to follow up on. On the 1963 leadership crisis, they of course, Enoch Powell and Ian MacLeod argued ...

PRIME MINISTER:

Incidentally, he was a good Leader of the House because he could command the House.

INTERVIEWER:

.... on that point, do you think one of his problems, I do not know whether you remember seeing him in the House during that period, was that he was also Party Chairman which nowadays seems a curious combination of roles?



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PRIME MINISTER:

No, I do not find it at all difficult, the idea that when you become Leader of the House you drop your beliefs is quite absurd. It was not unusual to be Party Chairman and Leader of the House. The idea that some Leader of the House forgets their Party allegiance, you are Leader of the House to get the Government's business through. It is part of our belief that you honour the traditions of the House, so there is no difficulty.

You get in because you have a passionate belief in your policies and the idea that all of a sudden they do not matter is to me a heresy.

INTERVIEWER:

Just returning if we could to 1963 ...

PRIME MINISTER:

Incidentally, he could get up and make an impromptu speech, I have seen him do it. He did not at the Party Conferences, I remember saying to him sometimes: "How in the world do you think of those things?" and he said: "Well you know when the adrenalin flows at the last moment, they just come". Well for some of us the adrenalin flows but we cannot get those phrases. Yes go on.

INTERVIEWER:

.. they felt so strongly, very strongly, that Rab Butler should have been the Leader and that the whole way in which the process had taken place ...



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PRIME MINISTER:

Look I thought Rab Butler's service to the Party was remarkable, and his service to the country absolutely remarkable, really and truly remarkable, and I agreed.

But you see that is not the point, the point is what happens when the Leader is finally chosen and you pull in behind him because of the cause and he really was, Alec was a remarkable person, is a remarkable person, is still a remarkable person. Alec's essence is service before self.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes absolutely. He is interesting on this. He clearly cannot understand even now why, at the end of the day, they would not serve, given that the others had, it is a fascinating thing.

Could I move back to the period just before 1970, am I right in thinking that the various proposals, some of which you implemented at Education, and specifically abolishing free school milk, was that something that had come from Ian MacLeod?

PRIME MINISTER:

No that was not in policy at all. It was after we had got back, we simply had in fact to carry out the general policy of cutting public spending and the question was where was it least damaging to cut it. The important thing was education and to keep in milk to the young people was quite a lot of milk wasted you know.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

So that was not any part of the policy beforehand, nor was it thought of.

INTERVIEWER:

So it was not an Ian MacLeod ...

PRIME MINISTER:

No, nor was it thought of. It may have been thought of, it came round very quickly, so it may well have been, if you look and see when it came round, it was not long after we had been there. We got in, and yes of course we had to have a budget fairly quickly. But it was no part of the actual policy, it was when you got in how did you best implement your undertaking to cut public spending.

And it came you know with the proposals from the Treasury and we adapted them because I said: "No we could not cut it out totally". I remember, do not forget, when I was a child we paid tuppence halfpenny a week for milk. And in a society with a much higher standard of living it did not seem impossible to ask for some payment, except for the tinies, from 5 to 7.

INTERVIEWER:

You said also about the period from 1970, after Ian MacLeod's death, that you thought that if he had lived then the U-turn might not have taken place because of his passion and his strong feelings

...



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PRIME MINISTER:

And his powers of persuasion.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes. Others indeed have argued to me that he had such an abhorrence of unemployment that when he saw unemployment rising he would have in fact ...

PRIME MINISTER:

That was not why the U-turn came. The U-turn was on Upper Clyde ship-builders and the U-turn was after the coal depot, that was why the U-turn came.

INTERVIEWER:

And Ian MacLeod would not have done the U-turn on that sort of issue?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think the arguments would have been balanced but I personally think that he would have come out on the side of proceeding with our fundamental objectives. I may be wrong. But to me he was much stronger on the philosophical side than many people seem to think.



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INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember him expressing any views in Shadow Cabinet before 1970 on Europe, on the European Community, and if I could just say why I ask you this, someone who knew him well thought that he had really cooled on the idea of Europe or was certainly worried about public opinion on the issue. Indeed it has been said to me that Ian MacLeod was quite in favour of the Conservatives committing themselves to a referendum before the Labour Party did. Does that have any ring to you at all?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, I cannot remember, you would just need to go through, it would have been shown in the minutes, perhaps not, perhaps not. It was Reginald Maudling who was not keen, as you know, who was not at all keen.

It would of course have been in keeping but I do not recall.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned what you learned from Ian MacLeod, the way he worked and so on, when did you first start working with him, did you know him from when you first came into the House?

PRIME MINISTER:

I had known him for quite a long time, I cannot quite remember, but do not forget if you lived in London, I remember he used to come sometimes and talk to the Candidates Association so I knew him for quite a time.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

Because do not forget I stood in 1950/51.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you have recollections, reminiscences or anecdotes perhaps of him when you were a candidate coming to a Constituency dinner or anything of that sort?

PRIME MINISTER:

Anecdotes are the most difficult things always to remember, I always think they are highly artificial and I do not have any. He always told us how he was chosen for the Western Isles.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you have recollection say of particular speeches or occasions later on, when you were in the House as well?

PRIME MINISTER:

The speech that we all remember most was the one at the Party Conference: "Let the Liberals dream their dreams, let the socialists scheme their schemes, but we have work to do". I can hear his voice. It was fantastic, it was the intonation. And I am afraid that it does not do him justice, that that was perhaps not one of the great political utterances.



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PRIME MINISTER (CONT):

You have two more minutes, Rob.

INTERVIEWER:

You have covered so much ground.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that was what I thought when I looked at your things that I had better say the things which I remember. I do again say Eve really was terrific, she was a Magistrate, I remember Eve leading a debate, opening a debate on defence at the Party Conference, Eve was very much a part of the political drive. And she was not limited, she was not limited to the health and welfare and the London Magistrate, she was in the real big strategic decisions.

INTERVIEWER:

There was just one final specific issue, the issue of immigration in 1968 when Enoch was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet. Do you remember Ian MacLeod's position at that time? I have read things and talked to people and they have talked about his very strong views on immigration, how did you see that at that time, did you share his view on that?



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PRIME MINISTER:

I think Ian was fully behind Ted's decision.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes he was, there was quite a bit of trouble in the constituencies, as you know, afterwards people like Nigel Fish were having trouble and so on and I think he was certainly fully behind Ted's decision but on the policy of immigration itself I think he was probably more well on the liberal ....

PRIME MINISTER:

You go and look at some of Ted's speeches on immigration before the 1970 election and it was not, we were quite for limiting immigration, no doubt about that, but the question, I remember it vividly, those people once they are here, and Enoch too said this, they must be treated everywhere like the rest, like full British citizens with equal rights and responsibilities, but we simply could not go on taking more and more in.

Now you go and look at Ted's speeches, that was the policy. So there were two things with which I agreed.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think he has had a lasting impact on the Party? Suppose there had not been an Ian MacLeod, do you think the Conservative Party would have been very different in the post-war period, would it be different now?



PRIME MINISTER:

It is very difficult to answer that because we who worked with him were very subjective and he was a powerful personality and in politics powerful personalities matter very much indeed. When he spoke you listened and I can only think that had he lived it would have been different. He was a powerful personality, he had strong views, he had this communication and as I indicated, if you got both the thought and the communication and it is that, they are the two great media of the time, the spoken and the written word.

INTERVIEWER:

I can remember now seeing his Party Political Broadcasts quite clearly in the 1960s and they were riveting occasions.

PRIME MINISTER:

It was a style, it is a different style today, but my goodness me it was a powerful style. When you have a powerful personality and a person who was in politics for what he could do for the country, it was a passion, it was not a living, so I think it would perhaps have been different. Alas it is so long ago. Just when he came to the zenith, because he stayed in the House that day, insisted on staying in the House on one of the early economic debates, and I remember to this day, I think it was Francis Pym who rang me up late at night, rang us all up: "We would not like you just to hear from the news" but the shock.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT) NNN