

Swatantra Party

INTER-OFFICE MEMO

November 17, 1962

Mr. Masani.

(610) File

Enclosed herewith is documentation of certain interesting facts during the period 1939-40 in Britain. This stuff has been compiled by me from Keesing's Contemporary Archives.

V.N. Bhat
V.N. Bhat.

*Issues — Coalition
No official opposition
By-elections continue*

May 7 and 8 of 1940 in the British Parliament:

(Notes and extracts from Keessing's Contemporary Archives)

Following Chamberlain's lengthy defence of ^{the}conduct of ^{the}war in Southern Norway -

Mr. Attlee (Leader of the Opposition - Lab.) said he thought the Prime Minister's tone on May 2 was over-optimistic and that of Mr. Churchill's far too optimistic. The P.M. had said on May 2 that the balance of advantage lay with the Allied Forces, but it was difficult, in the light of events, to say that this campaign had been so far to our advantage. To-day the P.M. had struck a rather different note - a good deal more of a note of excuse and explanation.

"No one wished to give any handle to the enemy but the House had a duty to the nation to examine the events which had occurred". "We are not afraid to face facts" he said, "This is a reverse"

"..... I have stories of boys, quite young, sent out without any training. Older and more experienced men ought to have been sent. What information had we through our Intelligence Service about the pending invasion of Norway? It is unbelievable that in Norway and Denmark elaborate preparations over so many months could have passed without indication. If we did get the intelligence, was it properly used?"

The gravamen of his attack on the govt. was that there was not sufficient thinking out of plans beforehand, not adequate intelligence, and not the necessary concentration on the essential objectives. He was NOT satisfied with the present war cabinet as an efficient instrument for conducting the war. The govt. was blind and deaf if it did not realise that there was widespread anxiety in the country. People were saying that those mainly responsible for the conduct of affairs had an almost uninterrupted career of failure. Norway followed Czechoslovakia and Poland. Everywhere the story was 'too late'. "Mr. Chamberlain" he concluded "talks about missing the bus. He and his associates have missed all peace buses, but not the war bus. In this life-and-death struggle we cannot afford to have our destinies in the hands of failures and men who need a rest."

Mr. Sinclair (Lib.opp) considered the govt. was right to act on the advice of their experts to evacuate Southern Norway. The criticism must be directed to the question why we ever got into a position in which we had to accept defeat in Norway

..... The first step towards adequate reparation should be a smaller war cabinet free from departmental responsibilities".

Mr. Amery (Con.) said that the whole conduct of the war upto date called for searching inquiry we must soon have a supreme war directorate- a handful of men, free from administrative routine, to frame policy. Equally important the govt. must be able to draw on the whole abilities of the nation the time had come ~~for~~ for a real national govt..... He would quote with great reluctance Oliver Cromwell :- "You have sat too long here for any good you are doing. Depart, I say and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go".

On resumption of debate on May 8, Herbert Morrison (Lab) strongly criticising the govt. ~~he~~ said that the P.M. seemed conscious of short-comings on the part of govt.... yet, he wondered whether the govt. took the business seriously as an essential part of operations or just as a demonstration to protect themselves from criticism.

.....Before and during the war the whole spirit, tempo, and temperament of at least some of the Ministers had been inadequate and unsuitable, in particular, the P.M., the Chancellor of Exchequer and Secretary for Air. Just as in the conduct of diplomacy they had lacked courage, initiative, imagination, ~~psychological~~ psychological understanding, liveliness and self-respect, so they had lacked these qualities in the conduct of the war too. He feared that if these men and other remained in office we ran a grave risk of losing this war. The issues were too great for us to risk losing it by keeping in office men who had not shown themselves too well fitted for the task.

... Because, in view of the gravity of these events the House had a duty and every member had a responsibility to record his judgment upon them, they felt they must divide the House at the end of the debate.

At this stage Chamberlain intervened: "As head of the govt. I accept the primary responsibility for the actions of my govt. and my colleagues will accept their responsibility too. But it is grave not because of any personal considerations - because none of us would desire to hold on to office for a moment longer than we retain the confidence of this House - but because it is a time of national danger. I do not seek to evade criticism, but I say this to my friends - and I have friends in this House - that no govt. can prosecute war efficiently unless it has public and parliamentary support. I accept the challenge. At least we shall see who is with us and who is against us. I call upon my friends to support us in the lobby to-night"

Mr. Lloyd George: "Mr. Chamberlain undoubtedly appealed on a question which is a great national, Imperial and world issue, and said "I have got my friends". It is not a question of who are the P.M.'s friends. It is a far bigger issue..... He (Chamberlain) has appealed for sacrifice. The nation is prepared for it so long as it has leadership. I say now, solemnly, that the P.M. can give an example of sacrifice, because there is nothing that would contribute more to victory in this war than that the P.M. should sacrifice the Seals of office."

Mr. Buff Cooper (Con^{servative}) said he had urged the formation of a National Govt. since the first defeat - the defeat of Munich. More than ever was the need today. It was not right to taunt the Opposition with unwillingness to accept the responsibility because it was unwilling to accept a certain leadership. While he regretted the division, he regretted still more the intervention of the P.M. when he appealed to the affection of his friends. "It would only be with the deepest reluctance and regret that I should vote against a govt. led by him. But in the time of war the issue is too urgent. With the deepest reluctance I shall be obliged to signify the lack of confidence that I feel in the present administration by going into the lobby against it"

Defending in length Churchill concluded with a reference to the vote of censure: "It seems to me that the House will be absolutely wrong to take such a grave decision in such a precipitate manner It is ungenerous and unworthy of the British character to turn in a moment of difficulty without the process of grave debate which should be taken. I am not advocating an end to controversy, but let pro-war feuds die, let personal quarrels be forgotten, let us keep our hatreds for the common enemy....."

On the division for the motion for the adjournment on which the debate had taken place and on which Labour Party had decided to challenge the ~~next~~ govt. the voting was:

For adjournment:	281
Against	200 - 139. Lab
	34. Con
	16 Lib
	4 Lib Nat
	4 Ind
	2 Nat Lib
	1 Com

200

(Manchester Guardian)

Following the severe criticism of the govt. in the House of Commons on May 7-8^{and} the demands raised by members of all parties for a drastic reconstruction of the cabinet, Mr. Neville Chamberlain resigned the premiership on May 10 and was succeeded by Winston Churchill.

In the early morning of May 10, after the news of the German invasion of Holland and Belgium, the executive committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party issued the following declaration:

"The Labour Party, in view of the latest series of abominable aggressions by Hitler, while firmly convinced that a drastic reconstruction of the govt. is vital and urgent, in order to win the war, reaffirms its determination to do its utmost to achieve victory. It calls upon all its members to devote all energies to this end"

The same afternoon the Labour Party Executive Committee meeting at Bournemouth for the annual Party Conference issued the following statement:

"The National Executive of the Party have unanimously decided to take their share of responsibility as a full partner in a new Govt. under a new Prime Minister which would command the confidence of the nation"

Mr. Attlee, Mr. Greenwood, the leader and Dy. leader of the Labour Party returned to London from Bournemouth and had consultation first with Mr. Chamberlain and then with Mr. Churchill. At 6 P.M. Mr. Chamberlain formally tendered his resignation to H.M. the King. It was learned that, following the voluntary relinquishment of the premiership by Chamberlain, the Labour leaders had withdrawn their objection to his inclusion in the new Govt.

Inner war cabinet of five members:

Prime Minister and Minister of Defence: Mr. Winston Churchill (Conservative)
Lord President of the Council : Mr. N. Chamberlain "
Lord Privy Seal
(Subsequently on May 18 appointed
Deputy Leader of the House) : Mr. Clement R. Attlee (Labour)
Foreign Secretary : Lord Halifax (Con)
Minister without Portfolio : Mr. Arthur Greenwood (Labour)
(Archibald Sinclair, leader of the Liberal opposition was appointed the
Secretary for Air).

The official announcement added that the leaders of the three parties participating in the new govt. whether members of the war cabinet or not, would be consulted when questions arose affecting the general character and aims of the govt. including the conditions of peace.

Dr. Lees-Smith (Lab) — *Labour spokesman*
P. Harris (Opp Lib)
Maxton (I.L.P.)
and Lloyd George (Ind. Lib) spoke on the motion of confidence in the new government.

On May 17. a letter was addressed by the Prime Minister to Chamberlain wherein Mr. Churchill stated that as the head of a National Government he felt it would be better if he did not undertake the leadership of any one political party and expressed the hope that Mr. Chamberlain's leadership of the Conservative Party would remain undisturbed by the change in Premiership.

These gentlemen spoke on behalf the respective groups in the House of Commons during the debate on the motion of confidence in the new government.

On May 25, Mr. Churchill disclosed that the salary to be paid to H.M.'s Opposition Leader is kept in abeyance since the govt. was a national Coalition with no recognised leader of the Opposition.

Some other interesting events:

Sept. 8, 1939. - The Labour Party had appointed several of its members to act as liaison officers between itself and govt. departments. They will maintain close contacts with the Departments in order that the Opposition may be kept constantly and adequately informed of the situation. e.g., Alexander - Admiralty; Dalton - Air Ministry etc.) (3719)

An agreement between the political parties not to contest any by-election during the war was announced on Sept 8 - the Party previously holding the seat being allowed to nominate the new candidate without opposition.

- Daily Telegraph (3723)

Mr. Chamberlain in his reply to Hitler's Reichstag Speech rejected the German 'Peace proposals'. Mr. Chamberlain's rejection of peace proposals was warmly welcomed by all quarters of the House. Mr. Attlee, leader of the Labour opposition declared that to accept the proposals put forward by Herr Hitler would be to "CONDONE CRIME AND TRUST THE CRIMINAL"