Dear Elector,

The basic case which I want to put to you as a Liberal Candidate is a short and simple one. It is, first, that only the most uncritical supporters of the Tory and Labour Parties can be at all satisfied with the records of their governments over the last 15 years. Second, whatever government is returned on March 31st its chances of improving on the melancholy record of the last 15 years will be immeasurably enhanced by the return to the House of Commons of an enlarged contingent of vigorous Liberals.

If we compare Britain’s economic performance over the last 15 years with that of almost any other western European country or with the United States—or Japan—we find that in almost all respects our performance has been inferior. We have been much less successful than our Atlantic competitors—or Japan—at expanding our output per unit of capital employed or per man hour. Our productivity has risen only very slowly. For the economy as a whole it has been a case, at best, of a “great limp forward”.

Because we have been unsuccessful in these respects, various unfortunate consequences have followed. Our share of world exports has gone steadily down. Our foreign exchange reserve position has been continuously precarious. We have built fewer new houses than we would otherwise have managed; we have built fewer schools, fewer hospitals and fewer new roads. And at the end of each year the increase in our real income (the increase that is in our wages and salaries minus the rise in our prices) has been very small.

No one, whether Labour, Tory or anyone else, can deny the poverty of our economic record compared with our competitors. The Tories will, of course, tell you that Labour’s record is even worse than their own. Labour will claim that it is miraculous to have managed to pull through at all, given the mess which they took over from the Tories. There is no need for Liberals to get involved in such arguments. It is enough for us that both Tories and Labour have bungled the business almost equally badly.

But Liberals can explain why our economic performance has been so bad. The chief reason is this: both the Tories and Labour have continued to appease, in office as well as out of it, the unrepresentative traditional elements which dominate their parties—and pay their parties’ bills. The Tories have failed—they have lacked the courage—to get tough with business. Labour has failed—it has lacked the courage—to get tough with the unions. Inefficient business has been kept alive under the protection of high tariff walls. Inefficient and restrictive trade union practices have been similarly kept alive. These are the basic reasons why our economic performance has been so poor. And these must be the matters which this election is about.

A Liberal vote on March 31st will be a vote, most importantly, against inefficiency and restrictive practice on both sides of industry. It will also be a vote for improved relations and understanding between the two sides. It will be an intelligently determined vote because it will have the greatest possible impact on the crucial question of economic performance. And until our economic performance can be improved our choices in other—in some ways more exciting—policy areas are bound to be restricted.
I would like to make three further points to you about a Liberal vote on March 31st.

(a) Liberals will use all possible pressure in the next Parliament to get Britain into the Common Market. They will do so in part for political reasons and in part as one of the best available methods for dealing with the general economic malaise.

(b) Liberals will insist that measures against the Southern Rhodesian rebellion must be effective.

(c) Liberals will continue to oppose, as they did in the last Parliament, the nationalisation of steel in the belief that it is totally irrelevant to the real problems of the British economy.

Your most important choice on March 31st is not what the Tory and Labour parties will tell you it is. Your most important choice is between a Parliament vitalised by the kind of pressure which a strong Liberal contingent can bring to it,—and a Parliament dominated once again by the inward-looking, unrepresentative and traditional elements which effectively control the Tory and Labour parties.

A strong Liberal contingent provides the best hope for:

(a) a vastly improved economic performance, a greater rate of increase in real incomes;

(b) entry into the Common Market;

(c) an end, on terms acceptable to the majority of the Colony's inhabitants, to the rebellion in Southern Rhodesia;

(d) no re-nationalisation of the steel industry.

There would of course be other benefits which could be expected from a strong, large Liberal contingent in the House of Commons. But I think these can be summed up by saying simply that good sense would be more likely to prevail than it has done in the past over the supposed interests of unrepresentative and old fashioned groups.

I make my appeal therefore to all progressive and radical people regardless of their former party allegiance. I believe that by voting Liberal you will be acting decisively to improve the quality of Government and of British life in all its aspects.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Oakeshott
Liberal points of emphasis in some main policy areas

DEFENCE
Our chief tasks must be to work for greater military integration with Europe and to cut back our "distant" commitments to a more realistic level.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Liberals will continue to give a lead away from outdated and inward looking nationalism and towards extending the usefulness of the United Nations.

HOUSE BUILDING
Liberals will exert themselves in favour of the modernisation of the building industry so that full advantage can be taken of prefabricated techniques.

REGIONALISM
Liberals will continue to work for a radical reorganisation of local government and the establishment, as fully democratic entities, of great decentralised regions.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
Through compulsory works councils, the encouragement of profit sharing and in other ways Liberals will work to break down the suspicion between the two sides of industry.

GOVERNMENT MACHINE
Liberals will keep up pressure for the modernisation and streamlining of the Government machine.

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