

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Secretary of State for the Social Services and the Secretary of State for Education and Science came to see the Prime Minister at Chequers on 31 December 1970 at 11.30 a.m.

The discussion ranged over a number of subjects.

Deprived Children

This was an intractable problem. Much could be done by the provision of play groups and day nurseries for under-fives, but this was extremely expensive. It might be possible to make a start in the worst-affected places with a relatively small sum such as £5 million a year.

Abortion Inquiry

The Secretary of State for the Social Services said that he was proposing to set up an inquiry into abortion. He would like to find a woman to be the Chairman. Mrs. Justice Lane would be very good, but the Lord Chancellor was unlikely to be able to release her. Sir Keith Joseph was considering Lady Brooke of Ystradfellte. The Prime Minister hoped that this inquiry would be conducted with all possible speed.

Fluoride

The Secretary of State for the Social Services said that this was a subject which raised the strongest possible

feelings. It would be possible for the Government to act only if an independent report were produced which gave an absolutely clear, unequivocal and strong lead.

Welfare Functions of the D.E.S.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science said that she was concerned about the extent of the commitment of her Department in the welfare field, on services and functions which were ancillary to the provision of education. These services included the provision of school meals, educational maintenance allowances, welfare and clothing allowances, school lunches, and free school transport (which cost £25m.). She was looking at the possibility of cutting down on these functions or possibly transferring some of them to the D.H.S.S., and might wish to discuss the matter further with Sir Keith Joseph. The provision of free school meals for some pupils presented an especially difficult problem. The need to check that free meals were given only in appropriate cases meant that in some cases there had to be separate queues for those entitled to school meals, and this led to considerable trouble. On the other hand, it had been impossible to devise a means of passing the payment direct to the parents concerned.

P.A.R. and P.E.S.C.

The Secretary of State for the Social Services said that his officials were developing P.A.R. with

enthusiasm. The problem had to be faced, however, that this diverted good people from other work..

The Secretary of State for Education and Science said that, though the basic information for P.A.R. in her Department was readily available, it was a new process which involved more people. It was requiring a lot more staff and she was not clear that it would make for better decisions. Within the Department they certainly knew enough to determine their own priorities within the educational field. She was not clear what role the Central Policy Review Staff would have in relation to P.A.R.

The Prime Minister said that the review of departmental functions which he had commissioned was being collated in the first instance by a group of officials under the chairmanship of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Civil Service Department with a view to submission to Ministers. P.A.R. and P.E.S.C. were continuing under their own machinery, and the C.P.R.S. would not be involved in them directly.

#### Scientific Research

The Secretary of State for Education and Science said that there was considerable confusion in the scientific world about the position of Government scientific research and of the research councils. The decision to review the

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position of the Agricultural Research Council had brought into question the position of all the research councils. She had received a letter from the President of the Royal Society, accepting that there might well need to be some review of the position of research councils but asking that such a review should be done in consultation with the scientific profession. There was disagreement between those who wanted to decentralise Government scientific research and those who wanted to achieve greater centralisation.

There was great need for clarification in this area.

The Prime Minister suggested that it would be useful if in the first instance Mr. Armstrong could talk with Sir William Pile.

#### Social Services - European Comparisons

Sir Keith Joseph remarked that the elderly were much better looked after in the E.E.C. countries than in Britain. On the educational side, Mrs. Thatcher said that German spending on further education was likely to rise sharply as the Germans went over to an American system of wider provision for further education with a higher drop-out rate. It remained her view that the British system gave the best further education. In general Governments of E.E.C. countries had much stronger central control over curricula than the Department of Education and Science.

In general, it was remarked that Britain was ahead of the E.E.C. in spending on the health service but behind on other social services.

At this point, Sir Keith Joseph left the meeting.

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Teacher Training

Mrs. Thatcher said that she had initiated the inquiry into the future of teacher training under Lord James, to be completed within a year. It was however proving very difficult to get a suitable industrialist who could give enough time to the inquiry. In general, she thought it might well be that provision would have to be made in future for teacher training and other types of further education to be provided not just as an immediate sequel to primary and secondary education but as something to which people could return, with a view to specific training, after a period in employment. In the meantime, the intake into teacher training colleges was disappointing in quality as well as in quantity. This might be in part a matter of teachers' pay.

Teachers' Pay

Mrs. Thatcher said that it was of first importance to achieve a revision of the structure of teachers' pay, so that the best teachers and those who were going to stay in the profession got better pay. At present, the Secretary of State had no power to give directions for restructuring; there was power only to fix the global amount of teachers' pay. There might need to be further legislation. There could well be a row on this subject.

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The unions concerned were split. The National Association of Schoolmasters favoured a restructuring, but the National Union of Teachers was divided between those who favoured restructuring and those who wished to take the whole of the increase on basic rates. Some improvement on the basic rates might well attract public sympathy: that a teacher of 24 should only receive £24 a week and should be unable to get a mortgage was bad for the profession and compared badly with starting salaries for good graduates in industry. Relatively low starting rates would be easier to accept if people saw some prospect for good remuneration for the high flyers; but the top rate in the State educational system was £4,700 for a headmaster in a large comprehensive school after 10 years' service, and there was in fact nobody on that rate at the moment. It was desirable to raise the top rate to something more like £6,000 or £6,500. In all this it had to be remembered, however, that teachers' remuneration was now £900m a year, so that the sheer cost of a 10 per cent increase was formidable.

R.S.L.A.

The Prime Minister asked whether preparations were well in hand for raising the school leaving age. The Secretary of State said that there was sufficient provision of buildings and (in numbers) of teachers. There was,

however, bound to be some increase in truancy in the bad areas, and at any rate initially a blind eye would have to be turned. Work had been done on planning the longer course that would be possible, but there was need for more practical guidance from the Schools Council.

#### Nursery Schools

Mrs. Thatcher said that she would like to do more for nursery schools but they were very expensive. Costs approached £140 to £150 per child as compared with £100 per child in a primary school. She was investigating the problem of charging for nursery education, though there were difficulties in the overlap with primary schools. Another possibility might be to lower the age of entry into primary schools from 5 to 4 and to provide half-time education between 4 and 6.

#### Higher Education

The Secretary of State said that there had been good publicity for the help which it had been possible to give for polytechnics. In the longer term she thought that it might be desirable to take polytechnics out of the control of local authorities and bring them under the aegis of a new polytechnics grants committee. She would not wish to bring them under a single grants commission covering universities as well.



The Prime Minister drew attention to the anomalous treatment of the London colleges of music as compared with the Royal College of Art. The Secretary of State said that she hoped to be able to provide additional money for the Royal College and the Royal Academy of Music. The Guildhall School of Music was looked after by the City Corporation, and there was some prospect that ILEA would take over the Trinity College of Music. She would be willing to consider the possibility of putting the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music on the same direct grant basis as the Royal College of Art. These institutions could be regarded as sui generis. More difficult problems arose in providing financial assistance for musical education at younger ages. The Prime Minister said that he would like to discuss the whole question of higher education in music further, and indicated that he would invite Sir Thomas Armstrong to come and discuss these matters with him in the early months of 1971.

REA

c.c. Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for the Social Services (pp 1 to 5 only).

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