

CONFIDENTIAL



KR  
Opposition  
leader

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

23 July 1976

I mentioned to you that the Prime Minister's meeting with Mrs. Thatcher on 21 July about the second British Commissioner in Brussels had ranged over other ground. I attach for your information two extracts from my note of the record dealing with their conversations about direct elections and devolution. The Prime Minister's comments about devolution and Mrs. Thatcher's response follow very closely of course the line of the Prime Minister's thinking which I had previously reported to you.

KRS.

CONFIDENTIAL

Sir John Hunt, KCB,  
Cabinet Office.



NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Prime Minister saw Mrs Thatcher in his room at the House of Commons at her request on 21 July.

Mrs Thatcher said that she wanted to put to the Prime Minister some ideas that the Opposition had about who might be the second of the UK's two Commissioners in the EEC. She recognised that consultation between the Government and the Opposition in 1972 had not been altogether satisfactory, and there were particular reasons for that at that time. Nevertheless she hoped that the Government would adhere to the policy of having the second Commissioner chosen from the Opposition side. The Prime Minister noted that 1972 had been difficult and indicated that he was willing to consider representations from Mrs Thatcher for the second Commissioner post.

Mrs Thatcher put forward two names. The first was Mr. John Davies: he was a superb linguist, in fact he was virtually bilingual, having been brought up in France, and his standing in the Community and the UK Parliament was high; he had established himself as the Chairman of the Scrutinising Committee; and he was very keen to do the job. Secondly she suggested Sir Peter Kirk: his standing in the European Parliament especially was very high and intellectually he was well up to the job; she was not certain about his health but she knew that he was very keen to do it although he recognised that he must be second to John Davies as a candidate. Mrs Thatcher added that she could not account for the suggestion in last week's Sunday Times that Sir Henry Plumb would be the Opposition's preference. In fact she thought he would not be an appropriate choice.

The Prime Minister noted Mrs Thatcher's suggestions. He commented that he understood from Mr. Roy Jenkins that he was not particularly enthusiastic about Mr. John Davies. But he added that he had himself been thinking of possible names from the Conservative side and wondered whether any at present in the Lords might serve, e.g. Lord Carr, Lord Aldington, Lord Carrington.

/Mrs Thatcher said that



Mrs Thatcher said that she was sure Peter Carrington would not want to, since he saw his future as being within UK politics, and that Lord Aldington would not in fact be available. She thought that Robert Carr would be a good choice although she noted that he was no younger than John Davies (in fact both are 60 this year).

The Prime Minister did not commit himself to any of the names suggested nor to any timetable for selection. He said that he doubted very much whether this was a matter to be settled before September. It was clear that Mrs Thatcher could come forward with other candidates at a later date if she wished to do so or that the Prime Minister himself might suggest an alternative.

Discussion then turned to Direct Elections and on this Mrs Thatcher said that she doubted whether this could take place in this country by 1978. She thought it more likely, in view of the detailed arrangements that still had to be worked out and provided for <sup>in</sup> legislation, that the Direct Elections could take place in 1980. The Prime Minister commented that he was not sure either about 1978. He thought that President Giscard would be in great difficulties with his Gaullist wing and that the French would probably find devices to defer the Elections without themselves incurring responsibility for doing so; he noted that they had started this process by calling into question the understanding that the Elections might take place on any one of four days from Thursday to Sunday and were pressing for them to take place simultaneously on the Sunday.

The Prime Minister said to Mrs Thatcher that he understood that she also had in mind that she might wish to suggest names of Life Peers to him. Mrs Thatcher said that she would be grateful for an opportunity to suggest two or three names for a working list of Life Peers later this autumn. She mentioned in particular Sir Peter Rawlinson, whose term as Chairman of the Bar Council was drawing to a close, who might legitimately expect, as in the case of Sir Hartley Shawcross, <sup>to be</sup> created a Life Peer. She had other senior members who would be interested in going to the Lords e.g. Mr. Joseph Godber. She hoped that if the Prime Minister were thinking in terms of a working list she would let him have reasonable notice for her consultation. She commented that both of them would wish to consider the by-election consequences of any Life Peerages.

/The conversation



The conversation then turned to devolution, when the Prime Minister, reverting to Direct Elections, noted that both of these subjects would be before Parliament in the next session. He explained to Mrs Thatcher his view on how the Devolution Bill might be handled in terms of timetable, i.e. by providing immediately after its second reading for a timetable motion which would be agreed between the Government and the Opposition on the basis of allowing a very generous time, perhaps 30 days, for consideration of the Bill. He specifically said to Mrs Thatcher that he was not asking for her reactions to this but thought she would find it helpful to know how his mind was moving. He went on to say that if, during what would no doubt be an interminable committee stage, the details of the Bill were amended, he would not be over concerned providing that the end product was a workable scheme which had been thrashed out and agreed on the floor of the House of Commons. Mrs Thatcher said that a Bill of this kind was a golden opportunity for the kind of obstructions which Michael Foot and Enoch Powell had achieved on the Lords Reform legislation under Sir Harold Wilson's 1964/70 administration. She said that both front benches would be in difficulty because both Parties were split on devolution and there would be quite a bit of cross voting. She concluded by saying that she was quite clear that the problem had got to be tackled and solved - "it would be bad for both Parties if Parliament failed to come to a decision, because it would hand the issue over to the SNP".

K.R.S.  
—

21 July 1976