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10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Constitutional Committee - Note prepared following a meeting held in Committee Room 14 at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 23rd January.

1. This meeting was well attended, and was addressed by Quintin Hailsham on the subject of Constitutional Reform.

2. He argued in favour of three reforms:-

(a) House of Lords

(i) He said that the House of Lords was an effective Chamber under Conservative Governments, but an ineffective one under Socialist Governments, because the Upper House was always threatened by the Parliament Act or by abolition if it used its delaying power under a Labour Government.

(ii) It was now exceedingly probable that the Labour Party would go into the next Election on a programme of total abolition of the Lords, or, at best, with abolition of all its delaying powers.

(iii) Sooner or later there would be another Labour Government.

(iv) Therefore we must have a House of Lords which will not be abolished, nor have its wings clipped.

(v) In his view, therefore, the only way of preserving the House of Lords in the event of a Labour victory was to have a second Chamber elected by universal suffrage, on the basis of Proportional Representation.

(vi) This reform must be made now.

(b) Devolution

(i) Quintin said that he believed that the present size of Local Government Authorities (i.e. Metropolitan and County Councils) was too small.

(ii) Although he was strongly opposed to the Scotland and Wales Bills in the last Parliament, he thought that the case for Devolution to large Regional Authorities had been made out, including giving two

new Regional Authorities the power to levy taxation.


(c) Bill of Rights

(i) He made the customary case for a Bill of Rights, saying that he was gloomy about the individual rights in the event of the election of a Labour Government.

(ii) He said that he did not believe that Scottish and Welsh Nationalism would go away.

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- A. It was clear from the reception given to Quintin and from the questions that followed that there is some support for Quintin's ideas about reform of the House of Lords.
- B. However, there is also considerable opposition to such reform, and I think that even among the reformers, there is no unanimity as to what reforms are desirable.
- C. My own strongly held view is that any attempt to reform the House of Lords during this Parliament would divide the Parliamentary Party, and that even if you were to decide to introduce a major Bill for the Reform of the House of Lords, the passage of such a Bill through Parliament would be exceedingly hazardous. Indeed, I do not believe that such a Bill would secure the approval of the present House.
- D. I suspect that we will have more than enough to keep us busy in the House of Commons during the lifetime of this Parliament.

28th January, 1980


Ian Gow