



CONFIDENTIAL

1922 Exec file

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN MRS THATCHER AND THE 1922 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT 4.15 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 1975, TO DISCUSS DEVOLUTION

Present:	Mrs Thatcher	Mr Edward duCann	} Officers
	Mr William Whitelaw	Sir John Hall	
	Mr Humphrey Atkins	Mr Charles Morrisnn	
		Mr Bryant Godman Irvine	
		Mr Philip Goodhart	
Sir Paul Bryan	Miss Betty Harvie Anderson	Mr John Biffen	
Mr Peter Horderm	Mr David Walder	Mr Mark Carlisle	
Mr Kenneth Baker	Mr Peter Rees	Sir Bernard Braine	
Sir Nigel Fisher	Mr Neil Marten	Mr Walter Clegg	

Mrs Thatcher and Mr Whitelaw opened the meeting by outlining the issues. There were two alternatives, to keep the present constitution or to move to a federal system. The latter must mean a reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament.

Mr David Walder raised the electoral dangers of doing too little. There might be a case for Assemblies for Scotland, Wales, and England with some powers, but we did not want another tier of Government. He would like to know our position on Proportional Representation.

Mr Peter Horderm thought it was not the time for a change. It seemed inappropriate to be contemplating devolution in a year when we had finally decided to stay in the European Communities.

Sir Paul Bryan was not in favour of a move to devolution. A Scottish Assembly of any kind was very dangerous and would act as a sounding board for the SNP.

Mr Mark Carlisle would prefer to do nothing, if possible. The immediate reaction to the Government's proposal for executive power for Scottish Assembly should be a reduction in number of Scottish Members of Parliament.

Mr Philip Goodhart Thought it would be difficult to do nothing without a referendum.



Mr John Biffen The controversial side of the issue related to Scotland. There was a good measure of agreement on Wales. England did not want regionalism. The positive case for union needed stating. He was opposed to executive powers or direct elections.

Mr Peter Rees spoke as a Welsh Unionist representing an English seat. He did not feel we should be bound by the Home Report. Tactically we should say we were only prepared to discuss the matter in a federal context. This would bring out all the difficulties.

Mr Kenneth Baker thought it inevitable that some form of Scottish Assembly would emerge. There must be a handbrake outside the House of Commons, but the Assembly should not have power to raise money.

Mr Charles Morris said that the majority interest was against devolution. We should do as little as possible. With an improvement in the economy the problem would diminish.

Sir Bernard Braine thought that any step down the road to separation was a mistake. Nevertheless, Scottish feelings could not be ignored and the proposals in the Home Report should be adopted but no more.

Miss Harvie Anderson said the problem was how to devolve without damaging union. She questioned whether the Government's Bill would get through. There was political advantage in being the only party to come out firmly in support of union and this was better than appeasement.

Sir Nigel Fisher thought we should stand four-square behind preserving the union.

Mr Neil Marten thought we should stand fast and give nothing.



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In discussion the following matters were raised.

Were we committed to a directly elected Assembly? Miss Harvie Anderson said the Mr Buchanan-Smith's commitment was made the day after the declaration of the poll in October 1974, and therefore was no commitment.

The Assembly was likely to be of a different political complexion to the United Kingdom Parliament and this would make difficulties.

Mr du Cann proposed that there should be a new Party Committee to deal with constitutional matters, chaired by Mr Whitelaw.

H.A.

Copy to: Mrs Thatcher
Mr Whitelaw
Mr Patten

12.11.75