

Deputy High Commissioner

High Commissioner

MRS THATCHER'S VISIT : IMMIGRATION

This minute summarises the discussions with Mrs Thatcher and Mr Adam Butler, on immigration, on 22 and 23 September.

2. Before her departure from Britain Mrs Thatcher had met Mr Male (PCG) and she had subsequently discussed immigration in Islamabad. Mr Butler told me they had studied the Hawley Report and the Runnymede Trust Report. I do not know what brief had been prepared by the Conservative Central Office, but Mrs Thatcher had no prepared list of questions.

3. At the first, general, briefing session on the afternoon of 22 September, when after worrying over administrative problems only 20 minutes were available for discussion, not much of value was achieved. Mrs Thatcher seemed at this stage more concerned to state her view of the problem rather than to elicit information. I do not think anything of value emerged, but equally there were no misunderstandings which could later cause problems.

4. On Thursday, 23 September, Mrs Thatcher returned to the High Commission for an immigration briefing. Apart from an amicably resolved shambles with over-enthusiastic press and TV reporters, in which Mrs Thatcher herself was not directly involved, all went reasonably well. We took her through the Waiting Room, to the Reception Desk, and thence to an Interview Room, where Mr Thompson was considering an application from the wife of a man who had illegally entered Britain five years ago, and now wished with her father-in-law to join him with five children. The interview went on its normal placid course, with Mr Thompson explaining to Mrs Thatcher the purpose of his questioning. Mr Butler commented to me that the dependents of an illegal immigrant were exactly the sort of applicants who should not be allowed to go. I replied that it was for Parliament and not us, to decide such matters, and that Parliament had accepted that such persons should be admitted. And in due course those applications were approved.

5. Mrs Thatcher then moved to Mr Rickard's room, where all available EOCs, plus Mr Rickard, Mr Ferris and myself joined her. (The High Commissioner joined the meeting in its closing stages.) Mrs Thatcher asked about various techniques and problems which the EOCs faced, and seemed ready to condone the grilling as opposed to the normal firm but courteous questioning of applicants. By and large she seemed more concerned with

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the nuts and bolts than with statistics, or future trends and did not express any strong views on the male fiancé problem. However, she did pick up the point that while we had almost exhausted the queue of those statutorily entitled to enter, we continued to treat dependents (ie wives and children) who are not statutorily entitled much as if they were, for that is what the Rules ordained. Mrs Thatcher pursued with us an Inland Revenue estimate (based on tax claims of immigrants in the UK) of a further 500,000 dependents (or, perhaps, 500,000 children; recollections on this point differ) in the sub-continent. We re-iterated that the Delhi dependents queue stood a little over 100 (167 at the end of August, though we are still trying to get nearer the truth in this difficult transitional stage just after the ending of the "airlines queue") and that Bombay, whilst considerably larger, would not begin to dent her 500,000. We suggested that the figure might include a substantial number of fictitious tax families, registered for the sake of the allowances. She remained puzzled.

6. Mrs Thatcher arrived, I think, holding firmly a somewhat black and white view that immigration has increased, is increasing, and should be stopped. She was initially somewhat abrupt in her reactions, but was much readier to discuss, listen and learn at the second session, and we think, increasingly appreciated the complexities. But she did not seem to be asking questions with a view to alternative policy; rather she seemed to be anxious to learn more facts and details, which no doubt will be built into her existing general view of the problem.

7. I have discussed these conclusions with Mr Ferris and Mr Rickard.

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W K K White