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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Prime Minister
 You told Mr Paul that you would
 enquire into the background of the
Indo-British exchange. I note that
Mr Bernard Levin was among the participants & that
 alone names cause the present Indian cost considerable

London SW1A 2AH

15 July 1980

Dear Michael.

Desiqueil. *Print 15/1/80*

Indo-British Exchange Conference

In your letter of 2 July about Mr Swraj Paul's call on the Prime Minister, you asked for a full account of what happened in connection with the Indo-British Exchange Conference.

The Conference was held on 25/27 June. It was the third in a series of privately organised conferences following a proposal launched in 1977 by Mr Roderick MacFarquhar to bring together leading figures from Britain and India with a view to achieving a better bilateral understanding, rather than the lines of the Konigswinter Conferences. The Government was not involved in their organisation and no Ministers or officials were to be invited. The two previous conferences were successful. They drew together academics, journalists and parliamentarians from different parties, with particular interest in bilateral Indo-British relations. On the British side a number of MPS from both sides of the House have been involved as back-benchers or members of the opposition. (For example, the Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin and Mr Timothy Raison have been involved in the past). The conference has been well supported by members of the Labour Party. But we are not aware of any specific involvement of the Socialist International as suggested by Swraj Paul.

For the two previous conferences (both held in India) the Government provided £2,000 and £6,000 respectively towards the costs of the British delegates. On this occasion it was decided, in advance of the detailed planning, to contribute up to £1,500 towards administrative expenses and that the Government would also offer a reception for those attending. However, pending details of the Indian participants, we did not issue any invitations.

The Indian organiser, Mr Thapar, who has made the arrangements for the last three years, ran into difficulty in assembling a balanced group of participants. This was brought to our attention by Mr Swraj Paul on 2 June. Although no official representations were received from the Indian Government we immediately asked the High Commission in Delhi to find out how matters stood. The High Commission advised that Mr Thapar was still trying to get a

/balanced group

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balanced group together and had approached specific supporters of Mrs Gandhi with invitations to attend. But when by 16 June it had become apparent that no progress was being made in this direction, we reviewed the situation again.

In retrospect it appeared that Mr Thapar had been ill-advised to issue invitations to members of the Opposition before getting acceptances from Government back-benchers. He was also hampered by having himself been a critic of Mrs Gandhi in the past. We were committed to the support for administrative expenses but judged that this was unlikely to come to notice. Mr Blaker decided that the idea of a reception, which would certainly have attracted Indian criticism, should be abandoned. (No invitations had been issued).

The postponement of bilateral official talks, to have been held in London on 27/30 June, was notified to us on 13 June. The reason given was that the Indian Foreign Secretary could not be away from Delhi at the same time as his Minister. There was no suggestion at the time that the decision was linked to concern about the Exchange Conference. The talks have been rearranged for September.

The Conference took place (a list of participants and the programme is attached). It has attracted no publicity here. Comments made to us by Mr Swraj Paul and the Indian High Commissioner subsequent to Mr Paul's call on Mrs Thatcher suggest that the matter is now closed as far as the Indians are concerned.

Yours ever
Roderic Lyne

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary



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