

BK ALE Home Affairs RM

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cc: Mr. Mount

10 DOWNING STREET

From: the Private Secretary

20 July, 1982

I attach a note of this morning's meeting to discuss Mr Mount's paper. There was some discussion at that meeting of how the programme of work it proposed should best be taken forward and the Prime Minister was then inclined to think that a meeting next week would be helpful. On subsequent reflection, however, ~~she feels that~~ to allow rather more time for Ministers to prepare the papers mentioned in the note she has decided to revert to a meeting in early September. She very much hopes that this will in no way reduce momentum of the work and has asked that papers should be with her at the latest by Friday, 28 August. Mrs Thatcher has also asked that the group of Ministers which met this morning should be known as the 'Family Policy Group'.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Kerr (HM Treasury), Imogen Wilde (Department of Education and Science), David Edmonds (Department of the Environment), Anthony Mayer (Department of Transport), David Clark (Department of Health and Social Security), Barnaby Shaw (Department of Employment), Keith Long (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office). Copies also go to David Wright (Cabinet Office) and Gerry Spence (CPRS).

(Timothy Flesher)

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From the Private Secretary

20 July, 1982

The Prime Minister discussed Mr Mount's paper on Renewing the Values of Society at 0915 hrs today with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Education, Environment, Transport, Social Services and Employment as well as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Mr Raison. Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr Sparrow and Mr Mount were also present.

The Prime Minister said that many of the problems the Government had faced were the product of a general decline in discipline and authority in society as a whole; only in the armed forces were such values now the norm rather than the exception. The Government had done much to engender a return to traditional values but Mr Mount's paper pointed to a need for a much more co-ordinated approach to be taken. The purpose of the meeting was to identify ways in which such an approach might be fostered.

It was agreed that an approach of the kind envisaged in Mr Mount's paper should not be presented as a spiritual revival; what was needed was a set of practical and specific measures aimed at encouraging the development of personal responsibility and wherever possible its substitution for a collectivist attitude. In some respects the tide of popular opinion was already flowing in this direction as had been recognised in the growing weight of research evidence that a stable home life was the key to a stable society. The meeting then examined a number of areas in which there was scope for encouraging individual responsibility.

Property ownership

The encouragement of home ownership was one of the Government's success stories. A million additional people were now living in homes of their own as a result of the Government's policies, although it was worth considering whether a more aggressive sales technique might encourage an even high proportion of tenants to buy their own homes.

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More generally, however, the quality of housing management tended to be very low; what was needed was a more imaginative approach to enabling tenants to have greater control over their communities, and in this context the experiments being encouraged by the Department of the Environment pointed the way. Other possibilities for extending personal responsibility in housing such as home-steading and rent-based mortgages also needed to be examined. It was only by achieving a higher degree of home ownership or tenant involvement that a greater degree of pride in the community could be engendered.

Education

A crucial element in improving the education system was to engage parents more directly in their childrens education and in this context the Department of Education and Science would shortly be producing a paper on choices in Education including the whole question of vouchers. Parental involvement, however, should not be at the expense of the self-confidence of teachers. Indeed the re-establishment of the authority of headmasters for their schools and of teachers in general was vital to the whole concept set out in Mr Mount's paper. The same applied to polytechnics and universities; their heads needed to be given sufficient authority so as clearly to be seen by their students as effectively in charge. Students themselves needed a much stronger sense of personal responsibility which a move in the direction of student loans rather than grants ought to encourage. The syllabus also needed to be examined; although some doubts expressed as to the feasibility of Mr Mount's proposal of a "Grammar of Society Course. There was scope for improving the teaching of logic and reasoning in schools.

Community Facilities

It was readily apparent that insufficient use was being made of community facilities such as schools. Partly because artificial restrictions had been placed on their availability by local agreements with trade unions. A comprehensive programme of opening up schools in the summer holidays was needed linked if at all possible with systems sponsored by the Department of Employment.

Industry

The private sector had a vital role to play in engendering values of individual reliance and one of the reasons for the decline of such levels in the inner city was the absence of the private industry. Policy should be aimed at involving the private sector more closely in the financing of community development, for example, by shared cost schemes. Similarly links between schools and industry ought to be encouraged; the Secretary of State for Environment reported that until recently there had been no formal links between local head teachers and industry in Toxteth.

The meeting recognised that an initiative aimed at restoring personal responsibility could not take on too prescriptive a tone. It could, however, create the right climate and to foster the right assumptions, for example, that authority should reside at the point at which it is most needed. The greatest need was for a re-establishment

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at the authority of the family and above all the initiative was aimed at restoring in children those values which seemed to have been lost in their parents generation.

Summing up, the Prime Minister said that the group was agreed on objectives; what was now necessary was to propose means by which the will to bring about improvements could be translated into action at local level even against the opposition of entrenched local and central bureaucracies. The Government had to project its vision of society more clearly. For the immediate future Ministers were asked to set out as quickly as possible an assessment of what was already being done together with proposals not necessarily limited to their departmental interests for what might be done. The proposals should be specific, immediate and practical. The Policy Unit and the CPRS would also wish to contribute. The group would meet again with a view to taking forward its work early in September.

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