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PM/80/26

THE PRIME MINISTER

*Prime Minister*

*Apex A B or C?*

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*Yes not*

*Print - 2/4*

Report of the Three Wise Men

1. There have now been two informal meetings of Ministers of the Nine to discuss the report of the Wise Men on Community institutions, and several meetings of the Permanent Representatives. The discussions have shown that many of the proposals are not controversial; I need not trouble you with the details.
2. It now seems likely that the only aspect the Presidency will raise at the next European Council will be the appointment of the next President of the Commission and the number of members of the Commission after enlargement of the Community, on which a brief will be submitted in the normal way. There will then be further discussion by Ministers of the report with a view to preparing for decisions at the June European Council. We do not need to agree a line for this European Council, though we might make a start on the main issues now.
3. The Lord Privy Seal has consulted OD(E) colleagues on these. The line he proposed, to which there was no dissent, was:
  - (i) Number of Commissioners should be reduced to one per member state next January when the Greeks join  
The French and Italians are against, the Germans rather lukewarmly for and we have not yet declared our hand. The small Member States all want a reduction but are not prepared to pay for it. A smaller Commission would be more efficient, but might tend to take a more independent line. We might well exercise less influence in it with one Commissioner, instead of two. There is domestic political advantage in the present arrangements which allow us to continue nominating one Commissioner each from the Government and Opposition parties. I propose that for the time being we maintain our uncommitted position.

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- (ii) European Council should draw up a priority programme for the next few years for Community action, with Commission collaboration

B. We accept that the European Council must give political guidance but we would not favour it being drawn into discussion of a detailed plan which would be either a strait-jacket or become irrelevant. The European Council should address itself to the major issues of the hour, giving a clear lead to the other Community institutions.

- (iii) The President of the European Council should attend the European Parliament whose views should be taken into account by the European Council

C. The French seem likely to oppose this proposal, President Giscard having no accountability to the French Parliament. Others on the whole favour it. I see no reason why we should object; it would show that we were taking the directly-elected Parliament seriously, but would not extend the Parliament's powers. Were we to agree, this would mean that you yourself should be prepared to make a statement to the Parliament when our turn comes round in the second half of 1981.

- (iv) Appointment of the President of the Commission

The Wise Men proposed that the President of the Commission should be appointed six months before taking office. We should agree to this. In the light of this proposal, the Italian Presidency want a preliminary discussion at the European Council of the identity of Mr Jenkins' successor so that a decision can be taken at the June European Council. The UK has no direct interest here beyond seeing the appointment of an efficient and independent President.

4. I am sending a copy of this minute to the members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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