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MOST CONFIDENTIAL RECORD ✓

# SUBJECT

Ce (81) 34 CONCS

29 October 1981

CONFIDENTIALITY OF CABINET PROCEEDINGS.

No.	Contents	Date

MOST CONFIDENTIAL RECORD  
TO  
CC(81) 34th CONCLUSIONS

Thursday 29 October 1981

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CONFIDENTIALITY  
OF CABINET  
PROCEEDINGS

Previous  
Reference:  
CC(81) 24th  
Conclusions

Before the Cabinet proceeded to the order of the day, THE PRIME MINISTER drew attention to the reports in the previous week's Press and broadcasting media about the proceedings at the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 20 October. She recalled that at the conclusion of the previous week's discussion of the economic situation and public expenditure it had been agreed that nothing should be said to the Press other than that discussions would continue (including bilateral discussions between Departmental Ministers and the Treasury) on levels of public expenditure for 1982-83 and subsequent years. It had been pointed out that any unauthorised disclosure of the proceedings in more detail could affect financial markets - as in the event it had - and the outcome of the by-election in Croydon. Despite that agreement, full reports had appeared, in the first instance in Independent Television News on the evening of the day on which the meeting had been held, then in The Times the following morning, and subsequently in other newspapers. Certain aspects of what had been published could have come only from someone who was present at the meeting. This was not the first occasion on which there had been damaging breaches of the confidentiality of Cabinet proceedings. The Cabinet should understand the implications. If what was said inside the Cabinet Room was to be systematically disclosed outside it, the time would come when members of Cabinet would not feel able to speak their minds freely; the Cabinet would cease to be a gathering in which major issues of policy could be discussed, and more resort would have to be had to discussion in smaller groups. If any member of the Cabinet was knowingly engaged in activities which could result in such disclosures to the Press, the only honourable course was for him to resign.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY, supporting the Prime Minister, said that Ministers must be able to disagree in Cabinet and reach compromises among themselves without having to be concerned about the risk that the proceedings would be widely reported in public. If that could not be the case, it put all members of the Cabinet in an impossible position, and undermined the confidence which should subsist among Cabinet colleagues. He recalled that at the previous meeting he had specifically suggested that Ministers should not even tell people in their own Departments or Private Offices what had passed.

In discussion there was general support for what had been said by the reports that had appeared. It was impossible to exaggerate the damage done in markets, in the Croydon by-election and to the morale of the Government's supporters in the House of Commons. There was no doubt that the reports of dissension and division in the Cabinet had had a damaging effect on the morale of Party workers in the Croydon by-election and of the Government's supporters up and down the country. The Cabinet faced the prospect of difficult discussions and decisions in the coming months, particularly in the economic field; they must be free to discuss these matters and to reach conclusions, without the risk of unauthorised disclosures which would diminish the effects which the decisions were intended to have. The danger was not just of direct disclosures to the Press. It was clear that members of the Press talked around widely, with a view to gleaning information not only from members of the Cabinet themselves but also from others to whom members of the Cabinet had talked about the proceedings, as they thought in confidence. As a result of this process, much of what was reported was at third or fourth hand, and the stories which appeared in the Press were not only damaging but also distorted.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that it must be the general hope and wish of the Cabinet that the kind of thing which had happened after the previous meeting should not happen again. If it recurred, the consequences for the future conduct of business would be both considerable and regrettable.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

Cabinet Office

4 November 1981