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SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

Prime Minister

DISPERSAL

I have seen the Foreign Secretary's minute to you of 22 February and Paul Channon's minute of 25 February, and I am minuting to support most strongly Paul Channon's approach.

It seems to me inconceivable that we could reduce our collectively agreed and publicly confirmed commitment to disperse at least 2,000 posts to Glasgow and East Kilbride without raising very considerable political difficulties. We received considerable criticism at the extent to which we reduced the previous administration's programme, but the local authorities and Scottish Members have, I think, accepted the logic of our reduced proposals, based as they are on genuine dispersal from London. Any further reductions would however seriously call into question the extent of our commitment to this reduced programme - I am already under pressure at the length of time which the MOD dispersal will take - and would be interpreted by the local authorities, the opposition and the media as evidence that the Government is prepared to breach its faith. Our Parliamentary colleagues in Scotland, as well as opposition members, have, as Paul Channon points out, strongly held views on dispersal, and Ian Sproat has recently sought assurances from me on it. To the Scottish public, moreover, dispersal represents a tangible measure of the Government's concern for Scotland, since it is one mechanism over which we have direct control. Hence I would urge most strongly that we should not reduce our commitment to disperse at least 2,000 posts.

I can appreciate that changes in the structure and functions of ODA since the previous Government decided to disperse 650 posts from it in 1974 will have affected the posts then identified. But we did consider last summer the number of posts to be dispersed from ODA and affirmed then that 650 posts should be dispersed. As Paul Channon points out, these are the only posts due to be dispersed

to West Central Scotland in the lifetime of the present Parliament and, in view of the political pressures, I hope that we can keep as closely to the present timetable as possible. I hope, therefore, that Peter Carrington can agree to look at the problem afresh in consultation with Paul Channon and either identify 650 posts from ODA despite the difficulties that that would entail or find further posts from FCO itself.

I am copying this minute to Members of the Cabinet, to Paul Channon and Norman Fowler and to Sir Ian Bancroft and Sir Robert Armstrong.

C. Y.

27 February 1980

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