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PRIME MINISTER

When Oliver Letwin came to see me I sketched out my views on Tom King's paper on strikes in essential services. Since I cannot attend tomorrow's meeting, I am writing to set out my views.

2 Perhaps it is most important to recollect - and to remind the public - that we are not starting from the position at the time of the winter of discontent. The 1980 and 1982 Acts have made great changes as will the Bill currently going through Parliament. Within the limits of what is both politically possible and also both workable and effective, there are not a lot of dramatic initiatives left.

3 I support the general thrust of Tom King's paper. Like him I shy away from compulsory arbitration. While so called flip-flop arbitration has attractions I do not think aspirations are yet sufficiently realistic, nor arbiters sufficiently hard nosed, to reply upon it.

4 So far as special majorities in strike ballots to achieve immunity are concerned, I believe it would be hard to impose levels abover 50 per cent without offering some concession in return - and I cannot easily think of a concession I would wish to offer.



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5 Tactically it might be a good move to canvass flip-flop arbitration. In the event that it secured wide-spread approval the risks might be worthwhile. I would not canvass the option of majorities above 50 per cent since it would be bitterly opposed by the union side and probably enthusiastically welcomed by the Party. It would thus be awkward for us to disavow it and we might not wish to impose it against absolutely solid opposition.

6 I am copying this to those who received Tom King's minute of 13 February, to Tom King himself, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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13 March 1984