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 CH SEC HMT  
 20 July 1984

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

Sellafield: The Black Report

The Prime Minister was grateful for the Lord President's minute of 19 July, in which he reported H Committee's consideration of the Black Report.

The Prime Minister has noted the Committee's conclusion that the Report should be published on Monday 23 July. She has also noted that the Energy Secretary's proposal for a national study of variations in leukaemia rates might be considered at the meeting of Ministers arranged for Tuesday 24 July.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the members of H Committee, to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Michael Reidy (Department of Energy), Callum McCarthy (Department of Trade and Industry), Ivor Llewelyn (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), Stephen Alcock (Office of the Minister for Health), Joan Dunn (Office of the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State's Office, Department of the Environment, (Mr. Waldegrave)), and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

David Barclay

Miss Janet Lewis-Jones,  
Lord President's Office

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PRIME MINISTER (2)

Black Report

I attach a note from the Lord President reporting on H Committee's discussion of the Black Report.

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The Committee felt that the Report should be published without delay: i.e. on Monday 23 July. It is known that the Report has been received, and the Committee were concerned to avoid any accusation of rushing it through in the last days before the Recess. This means publication before your own meeting on Sellafield, but in practice the discussion should not be prejudiced since most of the recommendations are for further studies.

The Committee originally favoured a written Statement. The Lord Privy Seal and the Lord President have reconsidered, and now believe that the Statement should be oral. This seems wise given the way previous Statements have gone, and the sensitivity of the subject.

H Committee left over Mr. Walker's suggestion of a national study of variations in leukaemia rates, for discussion at your meeting on 24 July.

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JMB

MS

19 July 1984



ccDP

PRIME MINISTER

Sellafield: The Black Report

At its meeting yesterday, H Committee discussed the publication and presentation of the Report of the independent advisory group investigating the possible increased incidence of cancer in West Cumbria (the Black Report). The report was commissioned by the Minister for Health after last November's ITV programme "Windscale - the Nuclear Laundry" which pointed to a possible increased incidence of cancer, particularly among children in the village of Seascale.

2. The report concludes that there is an increased incidence of leukaemia among young people in Seascale. It is not able to say with certainty that this is or is not due to the radioactive discharges at Sellafield, but gives a qualified reassurance on the possible health hazard to people living near Sellafield. With the intention of enhancing public safety the Report makes a number of recommendations. These are set out together with proposals on their implementation at Annex 1 of H(84) 26. H agreed with the implementation proposed.

3. There are, however, two points I should draw to your attention: on the timing of the publication of the Report and an immediate Government statement, and on the proposal in the Secretary of State for Energy's minute of 17 July to you for a national study of variations in leukaemia rates.

(attached)

4. On publication, the Committee started from the position that it would be sensible to decide the timing of this at the meeting you are holding on Tuesday 24 July on Sellafield discharges, in relation to decisions that meeting might reach on future discharge levels and their announcement. However, it is known that the Report has been made, one MP is believed to have obtained a copy already, and the deferment of publication even to the middle of next week could lead to accusations that the Government was postponing publication to so near the summer adjournment

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to try to stifle Parliamentary reaction and comment. As a secondary point, it also seemed desirable to distance the publication of Black from any announcement on Sellafield discharges; it might otherwise appear that the one had led to the other. In the light of these considerations the Committee concluded that the best course would be to publish Black and an immediate Government reaction in the form of a written question and answer as soon as possible (which in practice means on Monday 23 July). What would be said on recommendations 8 to 10 would not in any way foreclose the options on the reduction of discharges.

5. H also considered Peter Walker's minute of 17 July arguing that both tactically and on merits there was a good case for a national study of variations in leukaemia rates. The Committee felt that the arguments were evenly balanced. Some members felt that such a study would only cause concern about other areas (including Sizewell), to no good effect since there were no useful explanatory hypotheses to test. Others thought that the identity of locations of high incidence of leukaemia would become known anyway; that there were enough grounds for a study; and that it would help to put Sellafield in a less prominent perspective. There is a current study going on at Oxford whose results might also be relevant. The Committee concluded that such a study could not be included in the immediate reaction to Black, but that the case for such a study might usefully be further discussed at your meeting on Tuesday.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to the members of H Committee, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretaries of State for Energy and Trade and Industry, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Minister for Health, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DOE (Mr Waldegrave), and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Hov", written in a cursive style.

19 July 1984

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18 JUL 1984

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*Handwritten signature*