



PM/83/4

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Weapons and Public Opinion

1. In my minute of 7 January I undertook to let you have suggestions about the organisation of a special unit in the Cabinet Office designed to improve our efforts to get across to the public at large the Government's approach.

2. I should like to propose an arrangement on the following lines:

(a) a group of senior Ministers, under your chairmanship, should take overall charge of this operation. You will want to consider which colleagues should attend. In my view we should include MISC 7 colleagues as well as Cecil Parkinson;

(b) for operational day to day supervision, I think we need a smaller Ministerial team, perhaps under Cecil Parkinson's chairmanship. Subject to your views I think this might subsume the existing steering group run by Douglas Hurd and Peter Blaker and which includes Patrick Mayhew from the Home Office. This team might report to the senior Ministerial group from time to time as appropriate.

(c) in support of the smaller Ministerial team we might establish a special unit of officials in the Cabinet Office. This would be tasked with keeping under constant review the main topics of current interest; with monitoring public opinion through regular polling; organising the preparation of papers, pamphlets and lines of argument in support of the Government's case; ensuring the distribution of documents, via existing channels in the FCO and MOD, to appropriate non-governmental organisations, to the COI, the Churches and, via the party organisation, to the constituencies. It would also have to ensure that our backbenchers receive a regular supply of up-to-date briefing on topical aspects of the debate. In my view



the special support unit should not supplant the existing arrangements for press handling in No 10 in the FCO or MOD; these should continue to be the main channel of communication. But the unit would have to ensure a thorough co-ordination of the Government line at all levels under the supervision of the Ministerial team.

(d) as I mentioned to you, as head of the unit or working very closely with it, I would envisage a senior figure with experience both of the Whitehall machine and of handling the media, who would be able to devote virtually the whole of his time to the task. One possibility which occurs to me is Sir D Maitland.

3. I understand that Cecil Parkinson intends to speak to you on the subject in the near future. I believe his ideas are very similar to my own.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to Michael Heseltine and Cecil Parkinson, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

13 January, 1983