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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

"MINISTER FOR CHILDREN/MINISTER FOR THE FAMILY"

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 8 April about the possible creation of a "Minister for Children" or "Minister for the Family".

The Prime Minister was very grateful for this and has noted the information you provided.

I will of course be in touch with you again if the Prime Minister wishes to consider this matter further.

N. L. WICKS

10 April 1986

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Prime Minister

I promised this note because you had mentioned the possibility once to me. The idea does not seem to have much operational benefit and to be only superficially attractive in presentational terms.

Ref.A086/1061

MR WICKS

Possible "Minister for Children"/"Minister for the Family"

N.L.W
7.4,

You asked for a short note on the possible creation of a "Minister for Children" or "Minister for the Family", following the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Geoffrey Dickens MP on 30 January.

"Minister for Children"

2. Responsibilities relating to children currently rest with a number of different Departments, notably the Department of Health and Social Security and the Department of Education and Science but also including the Home Office (eg guardianship proceedings), the Lord Chancellor's Department (family law including children), the Department of the Environment (since 1983 responsible for co-ordinating Government policy on children's play) and the Department of Employment and the Health and Safety Executive (aspects of child employment). This allocation between Departments reflects the close relationship between particular policies relating to children and those relating to the population more generally.

3. An attempt to split off all responsibilities relating to children and concentrate them in a single Department would raise awkward questions of definition and would not avoid the need for close co-ordination between child related and more general policies on particular topics. The most that would be practical would seem to be an interdepartmental co-ordinating role fulfilled by a Minister located within an existing Department but bearing a courtesy title of "Minister for Children".

4. A remit as wide as "Minister for Children" could face the Minister concerned with the task of co-ordinating most DES responsibilities; present concerns might be better addressed by a "Minister for Child Welfare" whose interest in education would be confined to schools' involvement in the handling of welfare cases. Such a Minister's role might, given current concerns for child care, focus less on co-ordinating policy than on seeking to secure co-ordinated action on the ground. A difficulty would be that many of those with operational responsibility on the ground are outside central Government: local authorities, voluntary organisations, the police etc. The task for a co-ordinating Minister might be to negotiate guidelines with these bodies aimed at ensuring co-ordinated responses to individual cases.

"Minister for the Family"

5. Somewhat similar considerations apply to the possibility of creating a "Minister for the Family". Successive administrations have concluded that such an appointment would not be an effective or efficient way of implementing Government policies affecting families. The argument is that the range of policies concerned is so wide that a co-ordinating Minister's responsibilities would inevitably cut across and complicate existing Departmental responsibilities, and would overlap in a confusing way with more general arrangements for interdepartmental co-ordination. In 1984 Mr Conal Gregory MP suggested that a "Minister for the Family" should be appointed; the Prime Minister's reply expressed her belief that there would be no gain from such an appointment and that the general arrangements for co-ordinating Government policies related to family life were adequate.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

8 April 1986