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NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 4th FEBRUARY, 1985, TO DISCUSS THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY

P R E S E N T 8

The Rt. Hon. Viscount Whitelaw  
Lord President of the Council

The Rt. Hon. Leon Brittan QC MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Home Department

The Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Joseph MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
& Science

The Rt. Hon. John Biffen MP  
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt. Hon. Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Social  
Services

The Rt. Hon. Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for  
Employment

The Rt. Hon. Peter Rees QC MP  
Chief Secretary Treasury

The Rt. Hon. Lord Young of  
Graffham, Minister without  
Portfolio

The Rt. Hon. John Wakeham MP  
Government Chief Whip

Mr. John Gummer MP  
Paymaster General

Mr. Norman Lamont MP  
Minister of State, Department  
of Trade & Industry

Mr. Bernard Ingham  
Chief Press Secretary to the Prime Minister

SECRETARIAT

Mr. L. W. Lewis  
Miss S. E. Wallace

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the main purpose of the meeting was to consider the progress being made in setting up the departmental groups of backbench MPs on the lines agreed at previous meetings.

THE CHIEF WHIP said that progress was clearly being made although not all departments had yet established their groups. While the Department of Employment group was now set up and had already met, in most of the other departments concerned the position was that the names of Members had been provisionally agreed although in some cases these were still subject to Ministerial approval and in others the MPs concerned had yet to be approached. In discussion, it was agreed that, while some MPs might figure on more than one departmental list, this was to a large extent inevitable given the need to ensure a geographical balance within each group. It was also a recognition of the fact that some MPs were obvious candidates for approaches of this nature.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL, summing up a brief discussion, said that the progress to date had been good although he hoped that those groups not yet set up would be formally set up shortly. He

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also reported that he had had useful discussions with the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland since the last meeting. While they would be unable to attend meetings of the group regularly, they wished to be associated with its work and their Chief Information Officers would form part of the Official Group. The Lord President said that he would also discuss with the Secretary of State for Transport the relationship which his Department might have with the Group.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHIEF PRESS SECRETARY said that he had had a useful meeting with Regional Directors of COI. They were keen to play a part in the exercise and believed that they could use the speaking notes being prepared for the group particularly in briefing local editors, etc. They had also asked that Ministers making Ministerial visits in the regions should, wherever possible, set aside time to meet local editors. In discussion, it was agreed that meeting provincial editors on regional visits, possibly over breakfast or dinner, was always likely to be beneficial, particularly if the Minister concerned was able to relate his visit both to local and national issues. The importance of Ministers being as well briefed as possible on sensitive local issues was, however, recognised. The Chief Press Secretary said that he had also discussed with the Regional Directors the extent to which they would be able to help in monitoring the current exercise; he hoped that this would lead to some useful results. The Lord President said that monitoring was obviously a crucial part of the group's work and he hoped that Ministers would be able to report back on the progress they felt was being made at future meetings.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the Group needed to consider also the notes on pay and education submitted by the Official Group. In discussion, it was agreed that both notes were extremely useful although it would be helpful if that on pay could also bring out the relatively high rates of pay for young people in the U.K. as compared with Britain's major competitors. In further discussion, it was agreed that future notes might usefully cover the Government's record on the NHS in the light of the forthcoming decisions on the list of prescribed drugs; the Government's position on the coal dispute dealing in particular with allegations that the Government was intervening to prevent attempts at a settlement; and, possibly, the scale of investment in the water industry to coincide with the forthcoming increase in water charges. It was agreed that the note on coal might profitably include mention of the role of NCB Enterprises.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the group should meet again in two weeks' time to review progress.

Leigh Lewis  
Cabinet Office

5th February, 1985

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