

PRIME MINISTER

7 August 1986

Prime Minister

DRUGS - END OF YEAR REPORT TO H COMMITTEE

AND FUTURE PROGRAMME

Douglas Hurd reports the work of David Mellor's committee. He records three pieces of good news.

Firstly, the growth of the heroin problem has been restrained. However, the rise in the notification of addicts was still 25%, though this was 7% less than in the previous 4 years. Heroin seizures from Pakistan were down very considerably. The availability of heroin remains high and is sold at a stable and high price - about £85 per gramme - with purity at 30%-40% (a high percentage)

Secondly, the threatened epidemic of cocaine has held off, though Douglas Hurd's personal experience of seeing 'cocaine base' smoking in New York reinforces his fears.

Thirdly, the Government campaign to persuade teenagers to say no to drugs such as heroin and cocaine has had some success. Percentage rejection has risen from just over 80% to just over 90% from a similar sample of teenagers over the period of the Home Office campaign. It would be fair to add that the BBC programme 'Drug Watch' has had a significant effect in making the young say no to drugs.

The Government Shopping Bag

While the group argues that it is delivering good value for money, it also asks for endorsement for a package of measures set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the report, and it again asks, as last year, for authority to pre-empt PESC to make a major announcement at the Party Conference in October.

The Ministerial Group considers that their most urgent shopping requirement is still more staff in Customs. The paper does not specify exactly how many staff they would like though they give a maximum of 200. I have spoken to officials at Customs who, not surprisingly, say that their bid will be greater than the largest figure in the paper, possibly 463.

Total costs requested in the annex are as follows:

on the basis of only 200 more Customs officers (England and Wales)	£31.36 million
add Scotland (£2.3 million)	£33.66 million
add Urban Programme money (£1million)	£34.66 million
add Home Office Research '87 (£0.2 million)	£34.86 million

Conclusion

This is a good example of a successful interdepartmental committee's work. If any substantial announcement is to be made in October, an urgent review of the Customs bid should be made in September. With the exception of the Customs question, the package is moderate bearing in mind the scale of the problem.

Hartley Booth

HARTLEY BOOTH