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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet  
held at 10 Downing Street on

THURSDAY 9 MARCH 1989

at 10.30 am

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Lord Mackay of Clashfern  
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon George Younger MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham  
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
and Science

The Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke QC MP  
Secretary of State for Health

The Rt Hon John MacGregor MP  
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries  
and Food

The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind QC MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Paul Channon MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon John Moore MP  
Secretary of State for Social Security

The Rt Hon John Wakeham MP  
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon The Lord Belstead  
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon John Major MP  
Chief Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Antony Newton MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

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THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

Hon David Waddington QC MP  
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP  
Paymaster General

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robin Butler  
Mr R G Lavelle (Items 3 and 4)  
Mr P J Weston (Items 3 and 4)  
Mr A J Langdon (Items 1,2 and 5)  
Mr S S Mundy (Items 1,2 and 5)

C O N T E N T S .

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PARLIAMENTARY  
AFFAIRS

1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week.

Inner City  
Regeneration

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER said that a booklet entitled "Progress on Cities" had been published that morning to mark the first anniversary of the Government's Action for Cities initiative. It sought to illustrate the regeneration of inner cities by region the substantial progress which was being made in the regeneration of inner cities. At a press conference to launch the booklet, a number of colleagues had made announcements about various inner city initiatives, including an announcement by the Secretary of State for Employment of four new initiatives to encourage inner city residents to take part in Employment Training.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the booklet provided an excellent presentation of the Government's initiatives in the inner cities.

Landmine  
Explosion in  
Londonderry

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND said that an Irish Republican Army landmine had exploded in Londonderry on the previous evening killing two soldiers. Six soldiers had been detained in hospital but, contrary to press reports, none was seriously injured.

Fatal Train  
Accidents at  
Purley and  
Bellgrove  
in Glasgow

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT said that, as the Cabinet would be aware, there had been fatal train accidents during the previous week at Purley and at Bellgrove in Glasgow. There appeared to be no link whatsoever between the two accidents, but that would ultimately be a matter for the separate inquiries which had been established into the accidents.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that, following the two recent accidents and the fatal accident at Clapham Junction in the previous December, British Rail would need to make every effort to restore the public's confidence.

General  
Practitioners'  
Remuneration

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH said that the British Medical Association (BMA) was mounting a sustained and strident campaign which was ostensibly directed against the White Paper on the reform of the National Health Service but was in reality aimed more at the Government's proposals on the remuneration of General Practitioners (GPs). At present, salaries contained a large fixed element which was independent of individual GPs' productivity. Under the Government's proposals, GPs' remuneration would vary according to the number of

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patients which they attracted and their success in achieving targets for new services, including health promotion sessions and minor surgery, and preventive measures such as vaccinations and cervical cancer screening. There would be no reduction in the total pay bill, but the Government's proposals would have the effect of increasing the pay of efficient and energetic GPs at the expense of those who performed less well. These arrangements, which were consistent with those for determining the pay of other professional groups, would encourage a better service to the public. He would be making a major speech that evening to the Royal College of General Practitioners in which he would once again explain the benefits of the proposed new arrangements. However, the media were tending to give greater prominence to various mischievous and unfounded allegations by the BMA, for example that as a result of the Government's proposals AIDS patients might not receive proper medical care and elderly patients might no longer be accepted by certain practices. Negotiations with the BMA over the proposed remuneration package had been in progress for about a year, and he was clear that the matter needed to be settled within the next three or four weeks so that it did not become intertwined with the issues to be dealt with in the Health Services Bill in the following session. The BMA, which was representing the interests of the least efficient GPs, had sought to claim that the White Paper had changed the situation and that it was necessary to begin the negotiations afresh. As it was beginning to realise, however, he was now considering the use of his powers to impose a settlement.

In discussion, the point was made that there was widespread opposition among GPs of all political persuasions to the proposed new contract: they were claiming that some of their less responsible colleagues would be tempted to take on more patients than could be given proper attention and that GPs generally would have less time to engage in preventive medicine. This ignored the fact that, under the present arrangements, there was very little incentive for doctors with relatively few patients to increase their patient lists and that, under the Government's proposals, GPs who achieved targets for certain preventive measures would be rewarded accordingly. The medical profession had opposed all major changes in the National Health Service over the previous decade, including the introduction of the selected list of medicines and the establishment of general managers in the health service, and it was only to be expected that it would continue to oppose the Government's proposals on remuneration.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the proposed new pay arrangements would reward those GPs who were able to attract and retain patients and who met performance targets for specific medical services. It was important that the Government ensured that the public were made aware of the weaknesses of the present arrangements and the benefits which the Government's proposals would introduce. False allegations should be immediately countered by daily publication of the facts.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

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FORN  
AFFAIRS  
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Anglo-Iranian  
Relations  
Previous  
Reference:  
CC(89) 8.3

3. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that as expected the Iranians had formally broken off relations with the United Kingdom on 7 March. There had been an ineffectual attempt by Iranian moderates to stave off this break, with an allegation that the British Government had proposed a meeting of British and Iranian officials in Geneva last week: the Government had in fact rejected a proposal for such a meeting. He had informed the House of Commons on 8 March that in consequence of the Iranian action in breaking off relations the Government had decided to close the Iranian Consulate General in Hong Kong. He had also been able to announce, following a meeting with other Ministers principally concerned, that the Government intended to deport a number of locally engaged members of the former Iranian Embassy along with some other known activists. The details of these cases would be looked at individually by the Home Secretary. This was a matter of security, not retaliation. He and other Ministers had considered possible additional measures against Iran in the event of further Iranian inspired outrage. There were a number of steps that could be taken, although not always without cost to British interests, action against Iranair being one difficult case in point. He had to bear in mind the continued detention of Mr Roger Cooper in Tehran to whom a Consular visit had just been denied, though Sweden as protecting power would try to reinstate this. The Government was itself dependent on locally engaged Iranians in Tehran to protect British diplomatic premises. He would continue to make every effort to sustain the common front by European Community partners against Iran. This would be looked at at the next Foreign Affairs Council. There was some pressure to send Ambassadors back to Tehran. It was important to maintain the ban on high level visits by Western countries to Iran as long as possible. He had persuaded the Japanese Foreign Minister not to pay such a visit. New Zealand was another weak link but he remained hopeful that the New Zealand Government might in the end decide to put off a prospective visit to Tehran by their Trade Minister. He had also discussed the matter on 6 March with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr Eduard Shevardnadze. The latter's pious hopes that the Iranians would do better before long did not amount to much. The Soviet Government's rhetoric about a so-called Common European House did not appear to extend to a shared European concept of freedom of speech. It was very important to retain the sympathy of other Islamic governments for the British position. The United Kingdom had lobbied energetically in advance of the forthcoming meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference on 13 to 16 March in order to secure a moderate outcome. There had been robust support from Pakistan but Islamic governments would remain reluctant to speak out publicly in support of the British position.

THE HOME SECRETARY said that the action to deport certain Iranians would be taken with the powers he possessed under the Immigration Act. He was obliged to satisfy himself on a case-by-case basis. But the ground work had been done and the remaining formalities could be processed quite quickly.

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Conference on  
Co-operation  
and Security  
in Europe

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that he had attended a meeting in Vienna on 6 March of the 35 member states of the Conference on Co-operation and Security in Europe to launch two sets of new negotiations, on conventional forces in Europe and on further confidence-building measures respectively. The negotiations were beginning formally that day (9 March). Agreement had been reached with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on a Western negotiating proposal on conventional forces in Europe after intense last minute efforts to resolve remaining differences. As the first Alliance speaker on 6 March, it had fallen to him to outline the NATO proposals for both sets of talks, which amounted to a crisp, clear and concise package. By contrast the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr Eduard Shevardnadze, who had spoken just before him had not introduced any immediate dramatic new proposals, despite predictable red herrings about the inclusion of naval forces and early negotiations on short range nuclear forces. His impression was that these negotiations would be difficult but that there was some evidence of serious intent on the part of the Warsaw Pact.

Romania

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that he had met the Romanian Foreign Minister, Mr Ioan Totu, in Vienna and had expressed to him the Government's grave concern about the wholesale destruction of villages in Romania and the Romanian Government's disregard for human rights. This would be followed by a demarche in the name of the European Community as a whole. Mr Totu had lived up to his charmless reputation and had rejected British views with no apparent sense of shame.

Tibet

Previous  
Reference:  
CC(88) 39.3

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that as expected trouble had broken out in Tibet coinciding with the 30th anniversary that week of the 1959 revolt by Tibet against the Chinese. There had been widespread rioting in Lhasa, with differing Chinese and Tibetan accounts of what had happened. Martial law had been declared as from 7 March and the Chinese army was present in Lhasa in some force. All non-resident foreigners were being excluded from Tibet. There were two resident British citizens. Two British journalists who had visited Tibet as tourists were also being required to leave after investigation by the Chinese. A correspondent of The Times was also still in Tibet: his precise whereabouts were unknown but he was out of Lhasa and not thought to be in any immediate danger. He had raised Tibet with the Chinese Foreign Minister when he had met him at the Japanese Emperor's funeral in Tokyo. China took the line that they were willing to talk with the Tibetans about a resolution to the conflict; and the Dalai Lama's statement that he was not seeking independence for Tibet appeared to provide some basis for a rapprochement. He had expressed British concern to the Chinese about the trouble in Lhasa and about the human rights situation in Tibet; and would continue to do so as appropriate.

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In a brief discussion, it was noted that despite the fact that the Dalai Lama acknowledged Chinese sovereignty and was concentrating on trying to improve living conditions in Tibet, much of the protest on the part of the Tibetan people seemed increasingly to be an expression of nationalism and of resentment of what they viewed as Chinese occupation.

Republic of  
South Africa

Previous  
Reference  
CC(88) 32.3

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the President of South Africa, Mr P W Botha, had despite his illness reasserted himself politically and seemed to wish to remain in power. But since Mr F W de Klerk, as leader of the National Party, had taken over de facto other key Ministers and National Party caucus members seemed increasingly reluctant to accept that President Botha should remain. The latter could in theory continue as President until March 1990 before calling elections. He himself believed that an election would probably come sooner. Mr de Klerk was quite an impressive figure. Since he had won the party leadership by eight votes in the party caucus, he had positioned himself closer to the centre of the centre-right of the political spectrum and had made some sensible proposals. In this he had been helped by the behaviour of the extreme right Conservative Party whose ill-judged efforts had shown that the reinstatement of full-blooded old-fashioned apartheid in the country was now impracticable.

London  
Conference  
on the  
Ozone Layer

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT said that the London Conference on the Ozone Layer from 6 to 7 March, at which the Prime Minister herself had made two appearances, had been a great success. 123 countries had participated. As a result, to the present 31 signatories of the Montreal Protocol would be added 20 more countries who now said they intended definitely to sign, while 14 other countries would probably do so. This doubled the number of adherents to the Protocol who would together account for more than 50 per cent of the world's population. The Conference had been generally successful in raising the level of consciousness about the problem and stimulating a determination to take necessary action. It had received a very good press everywhere, with the possible exception of the United Kingdom.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the Secretary of State for the Environment was to be congratulated on the success of the Conference.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES  
Agriculture Council  
6-8 March

4. THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD said that at their meeting on 6-8 March the Agriculture Council had spent a full day considering the terms of a conversion scheme intended to encourage the movement of production from areas of substantial surplus to non surplus commodities. He had taken the lead in opposing the possibility of conversion into soft fruits, horticultural production and flowers, to which there was already evidence that producers were prepared to move without subsidy and at their own risk. These sectors were of considerable sensitivity in Scotland. Despite pressure from Spain, which would have made substantial gains from the availability of subsidies in these areas, a blocking minority had been secured. The Council had also had an initial general discussion of the Forestry Action Programme.

Exports of Nissan Cars

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY said that he had now written to Vice President Bangemann to make clear the United Kingdom's continuing concerns over the French Government's treatment of imports of Nissan cars manufactured in the United Kingdom. The Commission's initial reactions had been sympathetic. The Commission were continuing to follow up with the French authorities the issue of the substantial assistance given to Renault.

European Regional Development Fund

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER said that Commissioner Millan had announced on 8 March the areas expected to qualify for assistance under Objective 2 of the European Regional Development Fund and indicative percentage allocations to member countries. Although there seemed likely to be a reduction in absolute terms in United Kingdom receipts, the coverage achieved, when not including the London boroughs, had in other respects been anything more satisfactory than we might have expected. The United Kingdom's indicative allocation was also higher than that of any other member country. Initial press reports had concentrated on the latter features. Comments might become less favourable when a fuller analysis of the position had been carried out.

In discussion, it was suggested that to the extent that the overall outcome was less than fully satisfactory it would be necessary to make clear that the responsibility lay with Commissioner Millan. He had been unresponsive to continuing representations over the past weeks and his performance contrasted unfavourably with the importance he had attached, in press statements after his appointment, to achieving a good deal for the regions of the United Kingdom. However, it remained the case that an assurance from President Delors that our overall structural funds receipts would not fall had not been withdrawn. Against the background of our substantial net contribution to the European Community we should

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seek to maximise receipts through every possible means, and in particular to seek to ensure that United Kingdom project proposals were well prepared and submitted at an early date.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

5. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Lord President of the Council (C(89) 5) about the recommendations of The Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation Committee (QL) on the legislative programme for the next session of Parliament.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the starting date of the forthcoming session, which would be the third of the present Parliament, would inevitably be affected by the need to accommodate the present session's very heavy programme of legislation. Looking ahead, however, it was essential that the fourth (1990/91) session should start near the conventional time, and the forthcoming session must be planned with that in mind. Notwithstanding those constraints, it had to be recognised that the third session was the latest practicable time in the life of the Parliament for proceeding with some of the more difficult Bills that the Government wished to bring forward. The list of Bills which QL now submitted for the Cabinet's approval, set out at Annex A to C(89) 5, had been compiled with all these points in mind, and it clearly comprised an extremely heavy and difficult programme which would have a somewhat different character from the programmes of recent sessions. This programme was at the limit of what the Lord Privy Seal and he judged to be manageable. In order to keep within bounds it had been necessary to exclude Bills on town and country planning, restrictive trade practices and road traffic. All three of these Bills were excellent measures, but he asked the Cabinet to accept that no significant addition should be made to the programme unless room was made for it by an offsetting reduction. It would once again be essential that the major Bills should be ready for introduction at the beginning of the session and he asked Ministers in charge of Bills to give their personal attention to this. The planning of the programme would also depend, as usual, on the selection of an adequate number of major Bills to start in the House of Lords, and he asked colleagues to co-operate with him and the Lord Privy Seal in making this choice.

In discussion the following main points were made:

a. The proposed programme would be exceptionally controversial in both Houses since it contained a number of important Bills on which there were strong opinions that were not entirely set on Party lines. The Broadcasting Bill, the Health Services Bill and the Courts and Legal Services Bill were prime examples of this, and the protection of the environment was now such a sensitive issue that great attention would be given to the Bill on this topic, even if

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its proposals were not especially controversial in themselves. The successful presentation to the public of this difficult programme would require a great sustained effort by the Government, and it would be unrealistic to contemplate the addition of any further controversial material.

b. The case for including the Town and Country Planning Bill was nevertheless a strong one. The Government's proposals were known, and there was widespread expectation that they would be implemented promptly. Any postponement would expose the Government to increased criticism in this area and, in any event, some of the Bill's provisions were inappropriate for legislation in the fourth session. The proposed improvements in compensation arrangements for compulsorily acquired property were, however, much needed provisions that would be widely welcomed and would defuse much opposition to major developments.

c. The Human Fertility and Embryology (Control) Bill was bound to consume much Parliamentary time since it dealt with matters on which many members of both Houses had strong personal convictions. However, it would not be practicable to postpone this legislation beyond the present Parliament, and the third session was clearly the latest moment to proceed with a measure of this kind. It was not yet clear whether the Bill would inevitably provide a vehicle for proponents of reform of the abortion law, and the Government was certainly not bound to provide such a vehicle if it had any choice in the matter. Nevertheless, there was a strong possibility that the nature of the bill made it inherently vulnerable to amendments on abortion law reform, and the Secretary of State for Health was in discussion with the Lord President about the ways in which this might be handled.

d. The proposed Bill to enable the United Kingdom to join in international arrangements for mutual legal assistance was expected to have a smooth Parliamentary passage, though it was of substantial length. The remaining components of the large Criminal Justice Bill proposed by the Home Secretary were of a far more controversial nature and for that reason QL had recommended that action on them should be postponed to a later session.

e. While the Home Secretary did not press the Cabinet to reserve room for a Bill on Sunday Trading in such a crowded programme, the situation on that topic might well develop in an awkward fashion. The Conservative Manifesto at the last general election had undertaken that the Government would look for an acceptable way forward to bring sense and consistency to this area of law, and a group of important Government supporters had put in much hard work to that end. As a result, support was now being canvassed for a compromise proposal that would deregulate Sunday afternoons, though the position on Sunday mornings was less clear. An Early Day Motion would shortly be put down in the House of Commons and it might be that this would reveal a significant degree of support for a compromise policy of that nature in quarters that the

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Government would not wish to appear to ignore. Maintaining such an unresolved situation might be somewhat uneasy, and the matter was clearly unsuitable for legislation in the fourth session. Furthermore, the continued flouting of the present law was a matter of concern to the Law Officers and it was always possible that there would be a legal development in this field that precipitated a sudden crisis.

f. While a Bill on restrictive trade practices might not find a place in such a very heavy programme, this was a central area of Government concern and it was important that the Government should continue to work up its proposals and announce them in good time, so that legislation could be ready for introduction at the outset of the fourth session of the Parliament.

g. The North Review of Road Traffic Law had been given an exceptionally favourable reception by the media and the public, and the Road Traffic Bill, designed to implement these recommendations, would be assured of a similarly widespread welcome provided that it appeared promptly. On the other hand, if the Government did not proceed swiftly with this reform it could expect to face a good deal of criticism, especially if there were a run of bad road accidents, and Private Members would probably introduce their own Bills to implement the Government's proposals piecemeal. If, despite these arguments, it was impossible to accommodate this highly attractive Bill in the programme, then it might at least be helpful to authorise advance drafting authority for it, to ensure that it would be ready for introduction at the beginning of the 1990/91 session.

h. The Pensions (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill was described in Annex A to C(89) 5 as having the secondary purpose of scoring pension increases against the national funds that existed for teachers and the National Health Service. Those provisions had not been considered by the Ministers concerned, and their inclusion in the Bill depended on policy approval being obtained in the normal way. The Bill's place in the programme was not dependent on this, since it was necessary to implement certain European Community requirements relating to widowers' pensions.

i. The overall themes of the legislative programmes in the first two sessions of the present Parliament had flowed naturally from the last Conservative Manifesto. The forthcoming programme was of a somewhat different character, and it was not too soon to think about its presentation as a whole, and the themes within it that might be emphasised. One such theme might be the safeguarding and assurance of quality in various services to the public and in other contexts such as environmental protection and food.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that, in order to preserve the Government's room for manoeuvre, it was absolutely essential that the fourth session of the Parliament should not get off to a late start. Equally, it was inevitable that the next session

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should be the one to accommodate a good share of the more controversial legislation remaining to be enacted in the present Parliament. Taken together, these two pressures would impose a heavy burden on the whole legislative machinery. The Cabinet agreed with the Lord President that the programme submitted by QL represented the limit of what could be managed, and endorsed his view that there should be no significant additions to the programme unless room could be found for them by effecting reductions. Since the Cabinet was unable to identify any Bill in the programme which should be discarded, the programme set out at Annex A to C(89) 5 was provisionally approved unaltered. If circumstances dictated any subsequent change in the programme, however, then the possibility of including the Town and Country Planning Bill should be reconsidered since this was a most valuable measure: in particular, its provisions on compensation were much needed to draw the sting of the opposition to major development proposals. The other two Bills mentioned in paragraph 4 of C(89) 5 were of less priority, though both were important measures. The Road Traffic Bill was of a character that was well suited to the fourth session of the Parliament; but advance drafting authority for this Bill was a matter which the Secretary of State for Transport should discuss with the Lord President of the Council. It was important that Ministers responsible for Bills that had a place in the programme for the next session should keep a close eye on their preparation and ensure that they were ready for prompt introduction.

The Cabinet -

1. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of the discussion.
2. Provisionally approved the legislative programme for 1989/90 set out in Annex A to C(89) 5.

Cabinet Office

9 March 1989

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