



PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

Following our discussion at E(EP) on 17 March 1988 I have been considering how best to carry forward the remit then given to me. I have concluded that, given the complexity of the issues and the need to ensure a secure basis on which we can consider specific proposals for change, I should first seek up-to-date information about a range of issues affecting local unions and their relationship with the NUS.

Tim Janman has been pressing me for some time and has now tabled a Parliamentary Question. I have spoken to Tim and he is very happy that we should proceed in the way I have outlined. I attach a draft text of my proposed Answer.

I should like to answer on Monday since the issue may well be raised on Monday or Tuesday in the debate in the House of Lords: Glòria Hooper could then refer to my Answer during the debate. You may also find it helpful to be able to refer to what I will have said when you see the Conservative Collegiate Forum next Thursday.

I am sorry if this gives you little time to consider the matter but I should be very grateful if you could let me know by Monday whether I may proceed as I propose.

I am sending copies of this to other members of E(EP) and to Sir Robin Butler.

KB

Department of Education and Science

15 April 1988

Prime Minister
Content to proceed
with this holding
approach?

Yes - so long as
it's in favour. I don't want any
R2C6
15/4
convent-

temporarily

mb

DRAFT

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, if he proposes to make any changes in the arrangements by which student unions affiliate to, and fund, the National Union of Students.

MR KENNETH BAKER

The Government recognises that many individual students do not wish to be represented by the National Union of Students; it is also concerned that tax-payers' money made available to student representative bodies should be used to provide services to students and not used for political campaigning. However, to limit freedom of association, by restricting the right of local student unions to affiliate to a national body, would raise complex legal issues. I conclude that it is first necessary to look at the arrangements for student union membership and the provision of services to individual students at both local and national levels.

To this end, I intend to gather on a sample basis up-to-date information on the organisation and cost of student services within institutions, on the legal status of local unions, and on the organisational and financial links between such unions and the NUS. I am confident that institutions and others will wish to co-operate with this survey; and I shall be glad to receive any information or suggestions which interested parties may wish to put forward. On the basis of the information I obtain, I will reach conclusions on the best action to take and will then consult all concerned about these conclusions.

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

The Sub-Committee considered the arrangements for the financing and membership of the National Union of Students (NUS). They had before them a Minute from the Secretary of State for Education and Science to the Prime Minister dated 15 March 1988.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE said that Conservative backbenchers had tabled an amendment to the Education Reform Bill which would prevent the NUS from continuing as a confederation of local student unions, and require it to become a direct membership union. Individual students would then have a free choice over whether to join. Some change of this sort was desirable in principle. However the amendment itself raised substantial difficulties. It would remove the right of free association for local student unions, and might breach European Law. He therefore sought agreement to consult on a different proposition. This would provide a conscience clause under which individual students would be able to prevent their local union from paying affiliation fee to the NUS on their behalf. Their share of the money would then be diverted to another purpose, such as a welfare or scholarship trust.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a brief discussion, said that the present arrangement under which local student unions received money as a block grant from the governing bodies of their institutions, and then used part to pay affiliation fees to the NUS was clearly unsatisfactory. However the Sub-Committee was not convinced that the answer lay in a conscience clause of the sort proposed by the Education Secretary. More fundamental consideration was needed of the present arrangements, including in particular the financing and functions of the local unions. It could be argued that the provision of sports and entertainment facilities was the responsibility of the University or other institution itself, and that membership of the union should be entirely voluntary. Nevertheless the Sub-Committee recognised that this was a difficult area in which further work was needed. The Education Secretary should therefore bring forward a

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further paper considering all the issues raised by the present arrangements for funding local student unions and the NUS. In the meantime he should say in response to pressure from backbenchers that the Government was considering this issue, and was willing to look at any proposals to change the present arrangements provided they dealt adequately with the substantial legal and practical difficulties.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.
2. Invited the Education Secretary to bring forward a paper on the arrangements for funding local student unions and the National Union of Students, on the lines set out in the Prime Minister's summing up.

Cabinet Office

18 March 1988

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PM

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

18 April 1988

Dear Tom,

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 15 April. As I told you when we spoke, she was content for your Secretary of State to answer Mr. Janman's Parliamentary Question in the terms proposed. The Prime Minister would, however, be grateful if your Secretary of State could prepare a further paper for E(EP) on his proposals for changes to the present arrangements as soon as the further information has been assembled.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the members of E(EP) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

*Yours,
Paul*

Paul Gray

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.

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