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PRIME MINISTER

LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL

The Civil Contingencies Unit have laboured mightily, and have necessarily brought in a huge range of departments and agencies, including the AEA and the National Radiological Protection Board.

You can get a flavour of the report from the Conclusions section which starts on page 49. It is bureaucratic and would not, I think, carry much reassurance for the world outside. On the other hand, contingency plans are about bureaucratic things like committees and coordination: they cannot be otherwise without knowing the specific circumstances of the accident they will have to cope with, which is impossible.

Agree

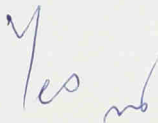
- the terms of the report
- that the next stage must be taken forward more quickly than this one has been
- that an interim announcement needs to be made in the form of a written answer by yourself (Cabinet Office will provide a draft)?



Duty Clerk

PP (DAVID NORNGROVE)

21 November 1986



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J/CPC

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P 02368

From: J B UNWIN

21 November 1986

MR NORGROVE - No 10

THE LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL

I have circulated to CCU Ministers for approval the first report on the Lessons of Chernobyl (CCU(86)9). This has been prepared by a Working Group of the CCU under Brigadier Budd in consultation with the main Government Departments and agencies involved.

2. So far as the Government's response to Chernobyl was concerned, the main problem was that no contingency plan existed for an external nuclear accident. There is a range of detailed contingency plans for dealing with an internal accident; but none for an accident outside the UK. We therefore had to improvise, drawing where relevant on the existing plans and using the Department of the Environment in the lead role under the daily supervision of the CCU.

3. In carrying out the post mortem we accordingly found it necessary not only to look at the Chernobyl type of situation but also to carry out a thorough review of existing plans. This has taken time in view of the need to bring in a wide range of Government Departments and agencies.

4. The examination shows that the existing plans are basically sound and that, if another Chernobyl occurred, we could deal with it on the lines of the last. But this is not good enough. There are weaknesses and we need both to revise all the existing plans in detail (eg on such matters as local evacuation arrangements) and to draw up in precise detail a comprehensive new plan to deal with an external accident.



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5. It has not been possible to complete this in the first stage. The consultation needs to be carried forward and extended. But this interim report identifies the weaknesses of the present arrangements and maps out the further ground that must be covered in detail so that new plans can be finalised. I should, therefore, subject to approval by the Prime Minister and CCU Ministers, like to be able to authorise the necessary further work recommended to be put in hand without delay.

6. Given the general interest, and the public knowledge that the Government are reviewing their plans, I think a public indication of the outcome of the work so far should be given. That this might appropriately be done in the form of an arranged Written Answer by the Prime Minister and, if the interim report is endorsed, I will submit a proposal for this separately.

J B UNWIN

Cabinet Office

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1936



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lie skw
PI - keep on
policy file

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

4 November 1986

CHERNOBYL

The Prime Minister has noted your report about the position reached on follow-up work to the Chernobyl disaster.

(DAVID NORGROVE)

Brigadier J.A.J. Budd,
Cabinet Office.

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10 DOWNING STREET

Police Minister 2

This is a rather
bureaucratic response
which does not do them
justice.

They have been
doing a very thorough
job under Brian
Wants' chairmanship.

DS

3/4

Miss N Roche

No 10

Chernobyl - PQ, Mr Gavin Strang

You asked for further information on the following aspects of the post Chernobyl review:

1. How many meetings have been held? The Working Group on the Lessons of Chernobyl (CCU(LC)) has held four meetings (on 17 June, 17 July, 18 September and 10 October).

2. Why has the review taken so long? The Working Group had wide-ranging terms of reference (copy attached). There are a number of very complex issues involved and a large number of departmental and other organisations inputs to consider. It was not until the end of August that the Soviet Union revealed the authoritative account of what happened at Chernobyl, thus providing the firm basis required for some of the Group's work. However, the final draft of the Working Group's first report is currently out for comment and the Deputy Chairman of the CCU, Mr Unwin, will be submitting it to Ministers later this month. The report is expected, amongst other things, to identify further detailed work to be done during the coming months.

3. What are the main problem areas? In outline these are:
 - a. Identifying the most efficient crisis management organisation;

 - b. Identifying the main elements of a new contingency plan to cover the whole of the UK, primarily to cope with the effects of a nuclear accident overseas but also to dovetail in with existing plans for an accident inside this country. The main elements are:
 - simultaneous countrywide monitoring;

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- provision of reliable and credible information and advice to all sectors of the community;
 - arrangements for public protection (eg. evacuation) and exercising the plan;
 - provision of advice to UK citizens overseas or preparing to travel overseas;
 - arrangements to control the movement of contaminated food and other goods
 - cooperation with our EC partners.
- c. Identifying those elements of current UK plans that need to be reviewed - with particular reference to the dovetailing referred to above.

If there is any further assistance you require please let me know. When the Group's report is submitted to Ministers we shall be making recommendations about publicising progress made.



BRIGADIER J A J BUDD

3 November 1986

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Terms of Reference for CCU(LC)

"In the light of experience in the United Kingdom following the release of radioactive material from the Soviet nuclear power station at Chernobyl the Working Group is to examine all aspects of existing UK National contingency plans for coping with the effects of incidents involving the release of radioactive material occurring within or outside the UK and involving civil or military establishment or equipment; with a view to recommending improvements to permit a more effective response to be made to any future similar incidents."

In addition a number of specific points were listed for coverage. They are attached

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ANNEX A

Specific Points to be Covered by The Working Group on
the Lessons of Chernobyl

1. A brief historical survey of the Chernobyl incident.
2. Identification of the ways in which current plans proved inadequate.
3. Assessment of the range of possibilities of similar incidents, with the potential to affect any part of the UK, occurring in the future and their probable effects.
4. The adequacy of early warning systems, including intelligence assessments, meteorological forecasts and "nuclear network" arrangements.
5. The adequacy of arrangements for monitoring and the collation and interpretation of data prior to health assessments.
6. The effectiveness of arrangements for coordinating the provision of information and/or advice to the media, and directly to the public to include the adequacy of communications available for this purpose and the possibility of using departmental regional facilities where appropriate.
7. The desirability of nominating a lead department and identification of the responsibilities such a department should undertake.
8. The role of the Civil Contingencies Unit.
9. The role of local authorities in the light of their responsibilities for emergency planning and civil defence.

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10. The effectiveness of arrangements for providing advice to UK citizens in affected areas overseas and their reception on return to this country.
11. The efficiency of arrangements for cooperating with other European Community states, particularly in areas of Community competence, such as external and internal trade.
12. The adequacy of legal powers available to control the import of goods contaminated with radioactivity and the appropriate circumstances for their use.
13. The possibility of recommended improvements to national plans being applicable to incidents other than those involving radioactivity eg toxic gases as experienced in the Bhopal and Seveso incidents.