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NAT. HEALTH ✓

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Secretary of State for Social Services

John Kerr Esq
Private Secretary to
The Chancellor of the Exchequer

8 November 1982

Dear John

STATEMENT ON NHS PAY

I enclose a draft of the statement which my Secretary of State is proposing to make to the House tomorrow.

I should make two points by way of a gloss. First, on the review body, the statement deliberately avoids going into the kind of detail which will be the subject of later consultation. Secondly, the terms of the statement generally, and in particular the final paragraph, may need to be revised in the light of the talks currently taking place between DHSS officials and the TUC Health Services Committee.

I should be grateful for any comments on the draft by 10.00 am tomorrow.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Michael Scholar (No 10), the Private Secretaries to other members of E(PSP), Muir Russell (Scottish Office), Adam Peat (Welsh Office), John Lyon (Northern Ireland Office) and Richard Hatfield (Sir Robert Armstrong's office).

*Yours ever,**David*

D J CLARK
Private Secretary

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SECRET

With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the pay dispute in the National Health Service.

On 16 September I put forward revised proposals to all the staff organisations as a basis of discussion. They envisaged discussions about improved pay determination arrangements for all NHS staff groups, together with a two-year pay agreement to cover the period until the new arrangements could come into effect on 1 April 1984. I proposed that the financial basis of the two-year agreement should be the 6 per cent and 7½ per cent pay increases already offered for this year, together with an additional 4 per cent for next year.

As a result of this initiative, there have been lengthy exploratory discussions with the professional organisations representing nurses, midwives and health visitors. There have also been discussions with representatives of the professions allied to medicine.

Following the Government's consideration of the outcome of these exploratory discussions, I have authorised the Management Sides of the Whitley Councils which negotiate the pay of nurses and midwives, and of the professions allied to medicine, to make revised pay offers covering the period until 31 March 1984. The financial resources which I have made available to them are on the general basis envisaged in the proposals put forward on 16 September, but the Government has agreed that, in formulating appropriate pay offers, these Management Sides may proceed on the basis that the pay factor for 1983/84 may be enhanced by a half per cent to 4½ per cent.

SECRET

I announced yesterday that the increased financial provision which the Government is making for the National Health Service in England in 1983/84 includes £40 million to continue into that year the Government's contribution to the cost of our June pay offer. In addition, we are making available this year an additional £10 million to health authorities in England to help them with the important task of maintaining their capital stock. This extra allocation will, amongst other things, help to avoid resources for the protection of the capital stock being diverted towards the contribution required from health authorities to the cost of the pay offers we have made to NHS staff.

I turn now to the question of improved methods of pay determination. As the House will be aware, the government is firmly committed to seeking improvements in the arrangements for determining nurses' pay. As long ago as August 1980 proposals were put by the Government as a basis of discussion to both Sides of the Nurses and Midwives Whitley Council by the then Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Reading South. Talks began in March this year. These discussions have shown that there is little prospect of agreement being reached on a satisfactory procedure.

In the light of these discussions and of those with the professional nursing organisations, and bearing in mind the desirability of making rapid progress, the government has decided to proceed with the establishment of a review body, which will have the task of making recommendations about the pay of nurses, midwives and health visitors. We propose that it should have the further remit of making recommendations about the pay of the professions allied to medicine such as physiotherapists and radiographers, the determination of whose pay has historically been related to that of nurses.

I shall shortly be launching consultations with the interests concerned about proposals relating to the composition, terms of reference, coverage and method of functioning of the new review body. It is intended that its first report should relate to the period beginning 1 April 1984, following the expiry of the two-year pay agreement now proposed.

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I believe that this decision will give the professions concerned the satisfactory basis for determining their pay which has hitherto so conspicuously been lacking, and that it will be warmly welcomed by them. It gives recognition to their special position, and in particular to the obligation which rests on them to abstain from industrial action because of its potentially disastrous consequences for patients. The government regards their position as wholly exceptional, and does not envisage extension of the review body principle to other staff groups who do not enjoy it already.

As regards the trade unions affiliated to the TUC, I have always indicated that I should welcome discussions, and have hoped that they would engage in exploratory talks similar to those which have taken place with the professional nursing organisations. Until very recently, they have not been prepared to do this. I therefore welcomed the recent talks between the TUC Health Services Committee and the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service, following which there have this week been exploratory discussions between representatives of the Committee and officials of my Department. I shall now consider urgently the outcome of these discussions, and the House will not expect me to say anything more at this critical stage.

National Health Service (Pay Dispute)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the pay dispute in the National Health Service.

As I have reported to the House, revised proposals on Health Service pay were put to all the staff organisations on 16 September as a basis for discussion. They envisaged discussions about improved pay determination arrangements for all non-medical National Health Service staff groups, together with a two-year pay agreement to cover the period until 31 March 1984. I proposed that the financial basis of the two-year agreement should be the offer for this year of 7½ per cent. to nurses and midwives and professions allied to medicine and 6 to 6½ per cent. for other groups, together with an additional 4 per cent. for next year. The proposals made it clear that there could be no more money for this year.

As a result of this initiative, there have been lengthy exploratory discussions with the professional organisations representing nurses, midwives and health visitors. There have also been discussions with representatives of the professions allied to medicine. I am glad to say that in the past few days talks have been taking place with the Health Service unions affiliated to the TUC.

Following the Government's consideration of the outcome of the discussions with the professional nursing bodies and the TUC health services committee, I have authorised the management sides of the Whitley councils which negotiate the pay of nurses and midwives, and of the professions allied to medicine, to make revised pay offers covering the period until 31 March 1984. The financial resources that I have made available to them are on the general basis envisaged in the proposals put forward on 16 September, but the Government have agreed that, in formulating appropriate pay offers, these management sides may proceed on the basis that the money available for 1983-84 will be increased to allow average pay increases for that year of 4½ per cent. The distribution of the pay offers within the cash limits set by Government is for negotiation within the Whitley councils.

If this revised pay offer is accepted the Government believe that better permanent pay arrangements should be established for nurses and other professions. As the House is aware, the Government are firmly committed to seeking improvements in the arrangements for determining nurses' pay. We put forward proposals as a basis of discussion as long ago as August 1980. Talks began in March this year, but the discussions have not shown the progress that we would want.

We should remember that we are dealing here with a group of dedicated and skilled staff who do not take strike action, because of the consequences of such action on patients. The Government believe that it is time that we settled upon more satisfactory arrangements. We have, therefore, decided to propose the establishment of a review body, which will have the task of making recommendations to Government about the pay of nurses, midwives and health visitors. We propose that it should have the further remit of making recommendations about the pay of the professions allied to medicine, such as physiotherapists and radiographers.

I shall shortly be launching consultations relating to the composition, terms of reference, coverage and method of work of the new review body. Like other review bodies, it would, in looking at levels of pay, need to take account of all relevant factors, including, for example, economic and financial considerations and service needs. It is intended that its first report should relate to the period beginning 1 April 1984, at the end of the two-year pay agreement now proposed.

I believe that this decision will give the professions concerned a much better basis for determining their pay and that it will be warmly welcomed by them. The Government regard their position as wholly exceptional. There can be no general extension of the review body principle to other staff groups.

This is an important step forward for the nurses and the other professional groups and, therefore, for the Health Service. The proposals that we have made offer a fair settlement for pay over two years, followed by the establishment of a review body. They provide an opportunity for stability in the National Health Service to make the service improvements that we all want and to recover from the damaging effect of the industrial action which has taken place this year.

On the pay of other Health Service staff, discussions with the health services committee are continuing. The aim must be to secure a resumption of negotiations in the relevant Whitley councils. That is the way forward and the proposals that I have announced today are a significant step in that direction.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe): The whole House will welcome the Secretary of State's conversion to the principle of the Clegg commission, but it is clear that the offer of a review body is to be restricted to the nurses, midwives and health visitors Whitley council. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to renege on the offer that he made earlier this year to other NHS workers of suitable machinery for negotiating their pay?

Are negotiations continuing with the TUC health services committee? Is it the right hon. Gentleman's intention to continue to try to divide one Health Service worker from another? Is it not clear that the negotiations could have been resumed much earlier and that it is only because the right hon. Gentleman has been prepared to go back to ACAS that there have been any grounds for negotiation?

Surely the Government will now accept that the actions of Ministers and their direct assaults upon groups of Health Service workers have been nothing but counter-productive since the beginning of the dispute and that if they had been prepared to take the advice of the Opposition and return to negotiations there would have been a much earlier end to this unhappy affair.

Mr. Fowler: That was a typically churlish and unworthy response from the hon. Lady. I remind her that one of the most disreputable actions of the Opposition has been to support industrial action throughout the dispute.

Let me make it absolutely clear that, contrary to what the hon. Lady appears to think, the review body is not in any sense based on the Clegg commission. That commission was based solely on comparability and was wholly inflationary, and no one was better off in the end. If the hon. Lady wants confirmation of that, I suggest that she asks the nurses for their views on the Clegg commission. They certainly do not want it.

screening clinic at the Royal Marsden hospital? Will she make it her business to see the report and give an undertaking to ensure that the comparatively small amount of money—about £100,000 per annum—that is needed to keep the clinic going will be provided, so that many women can be cured of breast cancer and so that even more can be relieved of anxiety?

The Prime Minister: I am not privy to the conversations between my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health and the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short). I know of the problem of that hospital and it is under consideration at the Department of Health and Social Security.

Q3. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 9 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Mawhinney: Has my right hon. Friend seen the report in today's edition of *The Times*, saying that members of the National and Local Government Officers Association are threatening mass resignations against the union's hard-line unilateral nuclear disarmament policy? Does that not once again confirm the fact that the British people want their Government to work vigorously for world peace, but on the basis of multilateral disarmament?

The Prime Minister: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. One-sided disarmament by this country would be an extremely dangerous step. It would imperil peace and jeopardise the freedom and justice that are essential to our

way of life. This Government will never enter into one-sided disarmament. They require disarmament to be multilateral, as that is the only way of gaining peace and security.

Mr. Stoddart: In the light of the American vote in the United Nations on the Falkland Islands, and of the CIA's gun-running activities with the IRA, does the right hon. Lady really consider the United States of America to be so reliable an ally that we should have cruise missiles in Britain from the end of 1983? Will she not now cancel the programme?

The Prime Minister: I understand that there is no truth in the assertions about the CIA and the gun-running activities. With regard to the United States vote on the United Nations resolution, I have made clear my views and disappointment at the action that they took, but it would be a mistake to fail to recognise that the United States is the final guarantor of peace and freedom and justice on our Continent of Europe. That peace and freedom and justice is safeguarded by the NATO alliance as a whole.

Later—

Mr. Allen McKay (Penistone): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to the Prime Minister's reply to the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. Foot) about pensioners. Is it right that the Prime Minister should—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he must not involve me in arguments between the two sides of the House on matters of policy.

[Mr. Mike Thomas]

the extent to which he is to blame for not sending the matter to arbitration before all the bitterness and argument occurred? Does he appreciate that if he had done that on the basis of the first offer the settlement would have been no different from the one that he has now obtained?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman at least welcomes the review body. With regard to his comments about a "divide and rule" policy, I remind him that the offer of 16 September was carefully worked out and was made specifically not only to the professional organisations but to the Health Service unions as well. It was to avoid exactly that kind of charge that the offer was made.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the resumption of talks in the dispute? Does he agree that the Clegg commission had damaging effects on the economy? Will he give an assurance that the new review body will not become like that commission so that the Government of the day lose their flexibility in paying the wages of the public sector?

Mr. Fowler: I assure my hon. Friend that the new review body will certainly not be like the Clegg commission—first, because the Government have no intention that it should be so, and secondly, because the nurses themselves would not want it to be that way. As I have said, I think that the comparison is with the doctors and dentists review body. The Government have lost no flexibility there. The DDRB is regarded as fair and Government policy has in no way suffered as a result.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington): Will the Secretary of State accept some responsibility for the prolonged dispute? Does he accept that it has been largely due to the small-minded and parsimonious way in which he has handled matters when he could have gone to arbitration at any time? Will he also clarify the Government's intentions? If the review body comes up with a recommendation that is not acceptable to the Government, will the Government accept it and not stand in the way? That is what we want to know.

Mr. Fowler: We should not be setting up the review body if our purpose were to ignore its findings. That is clear. Obviously, we must reserve the right not to accept recommendations in response to compelling national reasons. That is the normal position with review bodies and the assurance that my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) sought. I am not prepared to take lectures from the hon. Gentleman on industrial action when over the last month he has supported industrial action, and many of his colleagues have appeared on the picket line.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does the Minister accept that there will be widespread recognition of the restraint and the responsibility that he has shown in these negotiations, as any excessive wage offer can only be at the expense of medical facilities for patients? Will my right hon. Friend clarify one aspect of his statement? I understood him to say that the cash limit would be revised to accommodate the increased offer. If this is the case, can he give an undertaking that all local health authorities will be underwritten in any extra marginal costs that they may

have to meet in paying these extra wages, or will they have to make further economies to accommodate this incremental increase?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, I assure my hon. Friend that no further increases will be made for this year, and I have made that clear. Next year the amount is allowed for in the public expenditure figures that we have put forward. Therefore we shall not be requiring a contribution from the health authorities.

Mr. Ioan Evans (Aberdare): Is the Secretary of State happy with offering only 6 per cent. to Health Service workers, some of whom have a take-home pay that is less than £2,500, while his Government offer judges on over £40,000 a year an 18 per cent. increase? Is the Government's policy to be generous to the well-off while being mean and Scrooge-like to the low paid?

Mr. Fowler: Our policy is to seek to be fair within the Health Service resources to all those working in it. With regard to the TUC Health Service unions, I repeat that negotiations are continuing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Woolwich, West): Will my right hon. Friend accept my good wishes for the settlement of the whole of the dispute? Does he also accept that if the 4½ per cent. is accepted by NHS workers for the following year, other groups who are higher paid should accept that or less, so that the noises made to the lower paid have some meaning? Will my right hon. Friend add his voice to mine in talking the Prime Minister into trying to get an increase in child benefit so that the lower paid with family responsibilities can accept continuing low pay settlements?

Mr. Fowler: I hear what my hon. Friend says about child benefit. However, he will know that decisions on that are made at the time of the Budget.

Mr. William Hamilton (Fife, Central): Is the Minister aware that, even if these figures are acceptable, the nurses and other skilled and dedicated people, as he described them, will have suffered a considerable reduction in their standard of living over the years? Will the Minister give an assurance that if, as is likely, the rate of inflation increases beyond the 5 per cent. anticipated by the Government at the beginning of next year, that 4½ per cent. will be increased *pari passu*?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in the premise that he uses. If he takes the staff nurse as an example of what this 7½ per cent. and 4½ per cent. will mean taken together, there will be an increase of between £12.33 and £15 a week. That is what it means, and that cannot, in any fair sense, be described as a cut.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a peaceful settlement will be widely welcomed? However, is it not true that one of the reasons why he did not offer the Health Service more before was that it was rightly said that the country could not afford to pay more? If we have a review body, how will it arrive at a different formula as to what the country can afford? If the settlement is to mean anything, the review body has to know what that means.

Mr. Fowler: The review body will arrive at a formula in the same way as the doctors and dentists review body in the light of the evidence and the ground covered. We shall be able to give it evidence of the national economic

Talks are continuing with the TUC and the Health Service unions. I suggest that the whole House would want them to be successful. In relation to the hon. Lady's question about the longer term, the offer stands that we made on 16 September to have talks on the long-term arrangements for others in the Health Service. The talks will involve factors such as comparability, recruitment and retention of staff and what the nation can afford.

Finally, I remind the hon. Lady that the Government offers were put forward on 16 September and we have been having talks and negotiations with the professional organisations since then. Those offers are the basis of what is now coming forward. There is no truth in the hon. Lady's comments about the Government having gone to ACAS. The Government did not go to ACAS. The Health Service unions went to ACAS and as a result of that the talks continued. I stress, however, that the talks and the offer date from 16 September.

Mr. John Peyton (Yeovil): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the term "review body" is not one to set the heart racing or cause great enthusiasm? Does he agree that, historically, such bodies have been the repositories for difficult decisions that other people do not want to take rather than successful solvers of any problems?

Mr. Fowler: No, I do not agree with that—certainly in view of the experience of the doctors and dentists review body, which is the nearest comparison. The new review body recognises the special position of nurses and other professional groups who do not take industrial action and on whom we have relied heavily in the past six months. The professions have always wanted better permanent arrangements and the review body will ensure that they have them. The fact that these groups do not take industrial action has now been adequately recognised.

Mr. Clement Freud (Isle of Ely): Would it be convenient for the Secretary of State to give the House a guideline as to how long an industrial dispute must go on before the position is wholly exceptional?

Mr. Fowler: That is a rather foolish question. If the hon. Gentleman takes the trouble to study these matters, he will see that my offer was made on 16 September.

Mrs. Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people in the House and outside wish to congratulate him on his firmness, his realism and his patience, and particularly on his determination to ensure that the differentials between the pay of nurses and other Health Service workers are maintained, especially as they are always careful not to make their patients suffer in the pursuit of more money? Will my right hon. Friend also never fail to recognise that there are substantial savings to be made within the Health Service which could lead to more money being available for the deserving sections of it?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The differential of 1½ per cent. for nurses has been preserved and it is absolutely correct that that should be so. I am sure that many people in the nursing profession will greatly welcome this step. It is precisely what they have been fighting for year after year and it is right that we should recognise that.

Mr. Freud: Why has it taken you so long?

Mr. Fowler: I announced some weeks ago that we intended to take action on manpower and I shall have more to say about the manpower management inquiry in the next few weeks.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I propose to allow questions on this statement to run until 4 pm and then to take the second statement.

Mr. Reg Race (Wood Green): Will the Secretary of State clarify the position for the nurses and the professions supplementary to medicine? If the proposed review body makes a recommendation that the Government do not like, will the Government implement the award or will they retain a power of veto? Is he aware that offering an additional ½ per cent. to the one million Health Service workers next year is an insult that will not solve the problem of low pay and will deeply shock many Health Service workers who believe that they do a decent job for the community?

Mr. Fowler: There is no truth in the hon. Gentleman's charge. The offer means that there is now more than £660 million on the table for the nurses and other professional groups. That shows the Government's commitment to the nursing profession.

Mrs. Sheila Faith (Belper): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the current issue of the magazine *Marxism Today*, shows a picture of two pretty nurses with the caption, "The New Shock Troops"? Will he hasten the setting up of the review body so that nurses are not put in this reprehensible position in the future?

Mr. Fowler: We shall do our best to make progress in setting up the review body. We intend to make the consultation process as short as possible so that the review body can be established as early as possible in 1983 and can present its first report in time for the 1984 settlement.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Keithley): Why has it taken the Government so long to conclude that the Clegg commission or something like it has some role to play? Is it not typical of the Government's intransigent, hard-hearted attitude that the Royal College of Nursing, for example, has been closer to strike action than ever before in its history, and that only the tolerance and good will of the unions has saved the day? Does the Secretary of State agree that his statement that the unions and not the Government went to ACAS shows the willingness of the trade union movement at all times to enter into meaningful negotiations?

Mr. Fowler: That is an interesting rewriting of history, but it bears little relation to the facts. We made proposals for long-term arrangements as long ago as August 1980 and we have been having talks since March this year. There has been no delay by the Government. We have tried to make progress. As no progress was possible, we have taken this initiative, which I believe will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Mike Thomas (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Although we welcome the review body, do we take it that there is now no question but that the Government will strong-arm the rest of the Health Service workers into submission in pursuance of his "divide and rule" policy? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he must still face the question why the industrial action was necessary and

and financial position, on NHS resources, recruitment and any changes in terms of services. Therefore, it will be done in the same way as the DDRB.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): If the Minister believes that the establishment of a review body will improve industrial relations in the NHS for nurses and professional bodies, why does he not extend that belief to the other workers in the NHS who should equally be covered by the review body? Secondly, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the best thing that he could do for industrial relations in the NHS would be to get rid of his provocative friend, the Under-Secretary of State, who has made so many outspoken remarks about the Health Service workers and caused further problems in this dispute?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is calling for the resignation of the wrong person. [Laughter.] I have absolute confidence in the Minister for Health, to whom I think the hon. Gentleman was referring. The review body is intended to recognise the fact that nurses and the other professional bodies do not take industrial action. We rely upon their commitment and we wish to devise a fair means by which their pay is determined.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Huddersfield, West): Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that this Government, unlike all previous Governments, are determined that there shall be a proper wage structure throughout the nursing profession which reflects the fact that nurses and midwives do not strike and give their dedication to the nation?

Mr. Fowler: That is what we are trying to do in setting up the review body. It is something that many of those inside the nursing profession have pressed for and wanted over many years. It will be recognised and welcomed by the nursing profession, and will be seen as a step forward.

Mr. Kenneth Marks (Manchester, Gorton): The Minister seems to think that the Health Service workers enjoy striking, but they do not. What offer would he make to them in return for no-strike pledges?

Mr. Fowler: If the unions wish to give that pledge, we are willing to talk on the point. Talks are continuing. I pay tribute to all staff who have not taken strike action. That includes managers and ancillary workers as well as nurses. That is why it is so surprising and reprehensible that the Labour Party has not at any time in the dispute condemned industrial action.

Mr. Michael English (Nottingham, West): Why do the Government think that the Health Service differs from other services of the State? Why do we need another pay quango? We already have the top salaries review body, which deals with civil servants other than in the Health Service, judges and army officers. Why can it not deal with top people in the Health Service, such as regional officers? We already have a Health Service quango for doctors and dentists. Why cannot that body deal with the rest of the Health Service? Why can we not have one system of pay in the Health Service as we have for all three Armed Services?

Mr. Fowler: The response of the official Opposition was to welcome the setting up of the review body. The

hon. Gentleman appears to be going on a course of his own. The comparison, which I think that the hon. Gentleman has missed, is the most obvious one between the doctors and dentists review body. The link there is something that we shall be examining in the consultations.

Mr. Leslie Spriggs (St Helens): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the answer that he has given today to my right hon. and hon. Friends, that he is prepared to talk and talk again, is useless until he puts some real money on the table?

Mr. Fowler: There is over £1,100 million on the table already. I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's definition of real money is.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Scotland Exchange): The offer to the ancillary workers is a miserable offer to the lowest-paid workers in the NHS. Is the Secretary of State aware that I have the wage slip of a NUPE member, who is a caretaker in a health centre in Liverpool which shows that after five and a half days' work on split duties, this person takes home less than £40 a week? Is this not disgraceful, when the judges and the generals received an increase of between 18 and 19 per cent.?

Mr. Fowler: The ancillary workers' pay is one matter being negotiated.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): This November, will not 350,000 Health Service workers be earning a gross wage lower than the eligibility level for family income supplement? Will the Minister give an undertaking that, whatever final arrangements are made, that number will be substantially reduced, and in the statement that he finally makes on the dispute will he tell us how many Health Service employees still remain below that level of eligibility?

Mr. Fowler: I will certainly do the latter. In his first question the hon. Gentleman was using the April figures before the increase. The situation is not as he states.

Mr. Stanley Cohen (Leeds, South-East): Have not successive Governments, and particularly this one, traded on the dedication and commitment of the nurses and ancillary staff in the hospital service? Will the Minister assure us that the review body's recommendation will be implemented?

Mr. Fowler: The purpose of the review body is to ensure that no one trades on the loyalty of the nursing profession. We are trying to find a fair way to determine their pay so that there is no question of industrial muscle being used.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Secretary of State now give an unequivocal undertaking that he will regard the review body's finding as binding in the same way as this Government regarded the findings of machinery set up to determine police pay?

Mr. Fowler: We cannot give such an undertaking. We must reserve the right, if there are compelling national reasons, not to accept the findings. That is the normal situation with review bodies.