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From the Private Secretary

16 October 1989

FRENCH PROPOSAL FOR A NORTH/SOUTH MEETING

The Prime Minister has seen your minute of 13 October about the French proposal for a meeting of Sherpas on 10 November, to prepare a dinner and meeting with representatives of a number of Third World governments. She is generally content with the line which you propose to take in replying to Monsieur Attali (set out in paragraph 5 of your minute), and with the way you should proceed if he insists on going ahead (paragraphs 7 and 8 of your minute). The two crucial points so far as the Prime Minister is concerned are first that we should support the Americans in their bid to host the Sherpa meeting: and second you should not attend the meeting with developing country representatives unless all other Sherpas indicate that they will do so.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir Robin Butler.

C. D. POWELL

N.L. Wicks, Esq., C.V.O., C.B.E.
H.M. Treasury.

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Prime Minister

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seems to me that

Wijel should:

A. Support the Americans in
PRIME MINISTER their bid to host the Sherpa meeting

B. NOT attend the meeting with developing country
representatives unless all other Sherpas go (which
is unlikely). Agree? Yes no can 15/11

FRENCH PROPOSAL FOR A NORTH/SOUTH MEETING

The French are still pushing the idea for a North/South meeting which came up at the French Bicentennial. Attali's latest ploy is to propose to Sherpas:

- A brief meeting of Sherpas on 10 November to review Summit follow-up and to hand over the reins to his American colleague.

- That meeting would be used to prepare a dinner and meeting to be held the same day with the representatives of the Heads of State of Senegal, Egypt, Venezuela and India, as well as a representative from the Yugoslav Government. This meeting would, he says, be informal and would lead to no follow-up if that was the view of the Summit Sherpas. It is, in the view of President Mitterrand, the least that could be done by way of courtesy towards the Heads of State who raised the matter during the Revolutionary celebrations. Attali reports that items the developing countries want on the agenda include the drug problem and the environment.

Attali has emphasised that even if some Sherpas are unable to attend the 10 November meeting in the evening "with the representatives of the South", that meeting will still take place.

2. This is not the first time the French have tried to resurrect their initiative. At the Summit Seven Foreign Ministers' dinner in New York on 28 September, Dumas, who chaired the discussions, referred to the request which five Heads of Government had presented at the time of the Paris Summit for a new North/South dialogue. He said that this request had not yet been answered and a reply was due. He understood that the Sherpas were to meet

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shortly to consider a response. Clark's (Canada) response sounded positive. Baker (US) was noticeably and unfortunately silent. The Foreign Secretary questioned whether a dialogue was the right way of proceeding: next year's UN Special Session on Economic Recovery and Developments would be an appropriate forum for handling such questions.

3. Informal contacts with my Sherpa colleagues suggests that Attali's latest proposal has been received with scant enthusiasm and, in some cases, outright annoyance. My American colleague tells me that The White House are irked that Attali is trying to "shoehorn" his initiative into the agenda for the next US hosted Summit. Attali is arguing that it is "traditional" for the last Summit host to hold a brief meeting in the autumn to review the outcome of that Summit and to hand over the reins to the Sherpa whose country is hosting the next Summit. The precedents are mixed here. I am told that he held a follow-up meeting after the French Summit in 1982. But in 1988, 1987 and 1986 the autumn meeting was hosted by the Sherpa of the country hosting the next, not the previous, Summit; i.e. by France, Canada and Italy respectively.

4. My German colleague has told Attali that while he is in favour of a meeting among the Sherpas, he is "doubtful" whether a meeting with the representatives of the five developing countries "at this stage" will be useful. The dates cause great difficulty for the Japanese but I suspect they would field a representative at least for a Sherpa meeting, if not for the meeting with developing country representatives. The Commission welcome the opportunity for a Sherpa discussion, but are non-committal at this stage about the follow-up meetings. I would expect the Italians to be less dismissive of Attali's idea, and perhaps positively supportive. We have learnt that the Canadians will be sending their sous-Sherpa; their Sherpa has just been appointed Ambassador Designate to Tokyo so they have perhaps, conveniently, an excuse for this. They are trawling other Summit partners for their reactions. My American colleague is seeking instructions from the President with a view to taking over the hosting of the

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Sherpa meeting if that is possible and not attending the follow-up meeting.

5. I propose to reply to Attali on the following lines.

- While I would not wish to oppose a Sherpa meeting this autumn if other Sherpas felt one useful, the dates proposed cause me difficulties. I would be grateful therefore if consideration could be given to a later date. [The purpose of this tactic is to divorce the Sherpa meeting from the meeting with the developing country representatives. It would enable Attali to report the outcome of his discussion to later Sherpa meetings.]

- I would go on to say that I was surprised to see his suggestion that Sherpas should meet with representatives of the developing countries. That was not mooted, let alone agreed, in Paris. Moreover, the proposal is inconsistent with the Sherpas' method of business, which has operated with some success over the years. The Sherpas' role is to prepare the Economic Summits. It is not to follow-up previous Summits except where a specific remit is given, or to act as personal representatives of Summit Heads for non Economic Summit business. Such follow-up etc should be undertaken through the normal channels which exist. So we see procedural difficulties with Attali's proposal. [This argument ought to score with the French who traditionally are the greatest opponents of "institutionalising" the Summit and its preparations. But consistency and logic are not Attali's strong points when he has a bee in his bonnet. But the argument may attract those Sherpas looking for an excuse to pour cold water on Attali's idea.]

6. If you agree, I will reply to Attali in this sense.

7. If he insists on holding the Sherpa meeting on 10 November, I would go unless my American colleague refuses to attend. In those circumstances I would tell Attali that one of the purposes of the meeting - handing over the reins to his American colleague -

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clearly could not be fulfilled and a meeting would therefore be fruitless.

8. It seems unlikely that all my Sherpa colleagues would agree to attend Attali's meeting with the developing countries' representatives. But the Canadians and the Italians are usually weak vessels here; the Germans, whatever Tietmeyer says now, may crumble; and the Japanese cannot be relied upon to be solid. However, I am reasonably confident from what the US Sherpa has told me, that he will refuse to attend the meeting. In which case, I would propose to do likewise. In the unlikely event of US agreement to attend the second meeting, I would propose to go but to say very little. If the US Sherpa sends a representative to the evening meeting, I will do so too.

9. Do you agree that I should proceed in this way?

10. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Foreign & Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and to Sir Robin Butler.

N.L.W.

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