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*John Major*

*00029/6*

*29* June 1990

*mt*

*Dear Charles*

HOUSTON ECONOMIC SUMMIT

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You copied to me your letter of 26 June to Nigel Wicks, enclosing the letter from President Bush to the Prime Minister. There are two points on the approach to climate change which we feel should be picked up.

The first concerns the timing of negotiations of possible Protocols to a Climate Convention. Our own position has been that we do not see it as practical to run negotiations on possible Protection, for example on greenhouse gas emissions, in parallel with those on the Convention itself. However, there are several leading players, eg FRG, Nordics, who feel strongly that we need to begin work on possible Protocols as soon as possible. The issue has been avoided at recent international meetings by producing texts which draft around the different views. We felt that the draft communique for Houston also accomplished this. The US are now however proposing amendments which make very explicit that discussions on Protocols should not begin until the completion of a Convention.

This is certain to be resisted strongly by others. the main difficulty we see is that it will invite the more radical countries to press for the Convention itself to include concrete commitments. This is contrary to our long held view that it should be a framework convention allowing its completion at an early stage (perhaps for the 1992 UN Conference) and with the adherence of a wide spread of countries.

It may be that the US are aware of this, and would not be unhappy to see the negotiations founder. But we feel it important that we should discourage them from this approach and make clear its possible consequences. We do not need to give an explicit endorsement of the timetable either way at this stage, and it seems to us unnecessary to produce disagreement by pressing the point.

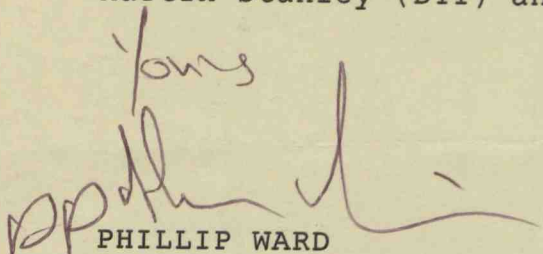
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The second issue has already been covered to some extent in the existing draft briefing. The US continue to assert that there is insufficient scientific basis for concerted action on climate change. This is of course contrary to the position the Prime Minister outlined in her speech on 25 May which recognised that the IPCC Report provides a basis for taking some prudent steps now whilst the science improves, so as to counter the worst case outcomes. We may need to continue to underline our view on this point with the Americans. Indeed, William Reilly (Administrator of the USA's Environment Protection Agency) argued at a private dinner with my Secretary of State this week, that it would be very ~~unlucky~~ if the Prime Minister was to explain her arguments as a trained scientist and on scientific grounds for taking precautionary action on climate change.

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Nigel Wicks is of course already in the USA for the Sherpas meeting, and I am sending a copy of this letter to him direct. In the light of the outcome of these discussions we will have a better idea of how to proceed in the final preparations.

I am also copying this to Stephen Wall (FCO), John Gieve (Treasury), Martin Stanley (DTI) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours  
  
PHILLIP WARD  
Private Secretary

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