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CABINET

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CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet  
held at 10 Downing Street on

THURSDAY 28 JANUARY 1988

at 10.00 am

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P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Lord Mackay of Clashfern  
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon George Younger MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham  
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
and Science

The Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke QC MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon John MacGregor MP  
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries  
and Food

The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind QC MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Paul Channon MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon John Moore MP  
Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon John Wakeham MP  
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon The Lord Belstead  
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon John Major MP  
Chief Secretary, Treasury

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon David Waddington QC MP  
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP  
Paymaster General

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SECRETARIAT

Sir Robin Butler  
Sir Christopher Mallaby (Item 3)  
Mr R G Lavelle (Item 3)  
Mr A J Langdon (Items 1 and 2)  
Mr S S Mundy (Items 1 and 2)

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PARLIAMENTARY  
AFFAIRS

1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week.

Human  
Fertilisation  
and  
Embryology

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES said that the White Paper on human fertilisation and embryology, setting out the Government's proposals on the report of the Warnock Committee, had already been very usefully debated in the House of Lords and would be debated in the House of Commons on the following Thursday. On the particularly sensitive issue of embryo research, the Government spokesman would put before the House the factual advice that was available to the Government on the medical issues, but would make it clear that the Government had not reached conclusions on the action to be taken. This approach was in line with that which had been adopted on the recent Second Reading of Mr David Alton's Abortion (Amendment) Bill. Although strong individual feelings could be expected on the issues raised by the Warnock Report, reaction to the Government's proposals set out in the White Paper had so far been encouraging.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a brief discussion, said that the issues raised by the Warnock Committee were potentially highly divisive, and legislation should not be introduced until it was certain that a wide measure of agreement had been obtained for the Government's approach. There should be no commitment whatsoever as to the timing of legislation until the picture was clearer.

The Cabinet -

1. Took note.

Paisley  
Grammar  
School

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND said that the Prime Minister's letter the previous day to the Rector of Paisley Grammar School had been greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the parents of pupils at the school, by the teachers there, and by parents and teachers at similar institutions. The letter had said that he would be laying regulations to expand the categories of school whose closure by an education authority would require his approval, and he would be making a Parliamentary statement about the regulations later that day.

1974  
Birmingham  
Public House  
Bombings:  
Appeal

THE HOME SECRETARY said that the Court of Appeal would be giving judgment later that day on the cases, which he had referred to the Court, of the six Irishmen serving sentences of life imprisonment for the Birmingham public house bombings. Depending on the conclusion and contents of the judgment, he might need to make a statement early the following week.

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Royal Ulster  
Constabulary:  
Investigation  
by Mr Stalker

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Local  
Government  
Bill:  
homosexuality

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT said that the proposal in clause 28 of the Local Government Bill to prohibit the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities had attracted a good deal of criticism from the artistic communities. While he believed these worries to be ill-founded, he acknowledged the sincerity of at least some of the anxiety that had been expressed. In response to this, and to head off the possibility of difficulties in the debate in the House of Lords the following week, he proposed to introduce an amendment to the Bill to clarify the prohibition that was proposed. He had it in mind that the clarification would bring out that only local authorities that had the intent or purpose of promoting homosexuality would be in breach of the prohibition.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a brief discussion, said that there might be some risk that increasingly refined formulations of the prohibition turned out to be counter-productive. Opponents in the House of Lords, and especially those with legal qualifications, might produce risible or perplexing examples of events that might, or might not, be caught by the prohibition, depending on the intent that was imputed to the local authority in question. The Government's proposals should be formulated so as to offer as little scope as possible for such scoring of legalistic points, and the Secretary of State for the Environment should consult the Attorney General on the matter.

The Cabinet -

3. Invited the Secretary of State for the Environment to be guided by the Prime Minister's summing up of the discussion.

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HOME AFFAIRS

The National Health Service

Previous Reference: CC(88) 2.3

2. THE PRIME MINISTER said that she had agreed, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Social Services, that it should be made known that the Government was carrying out an internal review of the National Health Service, with special emphasis on the hospital service. For the time being, nothing further should be said which might give rise to pressure for further information about the timetable or likely conclusions.

Industrial Action in the National Health Service

Previous Reference: CC(88) 2.3

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES said that nurses at a number of hospitals had announced that they would be taking one-day strike action the following week. These decisions had been taken at poorly attended meetings and it was difficult to estimate the scale of the strike action which would occur. It was clear, however, that those organising the action would seek to present it as protest demonstrations. The leaders of the trade unions principally concerned, the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the National Union of Public Employees and the National Association of Local Government Officers, were becoming increasingly concerned that any action which caused suffering to patients would be deeply resented by the public and would be damaging politically to the Labour Party. He had asked each District and Regional Health Authority to inform him of any operations that were postponed or other changes to regimes which were required as a result of the forthcoming industrial action. He would certainly wish to draw to public attention any reports of hardships caused to individual patients. Members of the London Ambulance Service would also be taking strike action the following week, but he did not think that the scale of the disruption would be sufficient to require the implementation of emergency procedures.

Industrial Action in the Coal Industry

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS) had broken off pay negotiations with British Coal. British Coal had referred the dispute to the National Reference Tribunal, whose findings were binding on both sides. He expected that a ballot of the membership of NACODS held earlier that week would authorise the union's national executive to initiate industrial action short of indefinite strike action. NACODS were co-ordinating their action with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which would probably decide at a delegate conference the following week to step up their current overtime ban. He was keeping in close touch with British Coal, and he and the Secretary of State for Employment were considering the next steps. The coal stocks available to the Central Electricity Generating Board were very substantial.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES said that British Coal would announce shortly the closure of two large pits in Wales. This would clearly be a focus for protests by Mr Arthur Scargill and other militant members of the NUM. But such protests would carry far less credibility if British Coal were able to announce at the same time that agreement had been reached with the NUM in Wales, against the strong opposition of Mr Scargill, to introduce six day working at Margam Colliery. He believed that the majority of Welsh mineworkers favoured six day working at Margam and it was important that British Coal should seize the initiative and come forward with detailed proposals for giving effect to it.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Secretary of State for Energy should keep in close touch with the Secretary of State for Wales about the handling of these matters. The Government's tactics throughout should be designed to support the moderate elements among the mineworkers.

The Cabinet

1. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of the discussion and invited the Secretary of State for Energy and the Secretary of State for Wales to be guided accordingly.

Industrial  
Action at  
Ford Motor  
Company  
Limited

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT said that employees at Ford Motor Company Limited had voted heavily in favour of strike action against a three year pay deal offered by the management. The two sides were due to meet again later that day to try to reach a settlement. The prospect of industrial action or of an increased offer from the management was unwelcome. Moreover, industrial action would put in jeopardy the creation of new jobs at Dagenham and Liverpool arising out of plans to shift production away from continental Europe.

The Cabinet -

2. Took note.

COMMUNITY  
AFFAIRS

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Future  
Financing

3. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the handling and brevity of the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 25 January indicated that the German Presidency were still in disarray. The German Foreign Minister, Herr Genscher, had as a diversionary tactic encouraged debate on the United Kingdom abatement. Exposition of the case for not re-opening the solutions reached at Fontainebleau had attracted in particular Italian support. The structural funds remained a difficult issue. We would need to continue to work hard at keeping the Germans, French and Dutch to acceptance of the need to contain growth within 1½ times the maximum rate. Agricultural reform remained the central issue,

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with the dominant problem being the inadequate Presidency proposals for cereals and oilseeds. It would be necessary to recover this ground. Our alliance with the Dutch remained firm and we were jointly making efforts to mobilise pressure on both the Commission and the Presidency. Although he was not optimistic about the prospects for early agreement, we should not ourselves signal doubts but keep the Germans in the dock.

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD said that in some respects the meeting of the Agriculture Council on 23-24 January had not been unsuccessful. The Presidency had sought to re-open the position on a number of the commodities in the Copenhagen package but he had been able to mobilise a majority to resist this approach. It had been accepted that adoption of a set aside scheme could not provide a case for abandoning stabilisers in that area. Proposals for a drastically weakened variant of the oilseed stabiliser had also not been followed through. The discriminatory quality of the proposals on the co-responsibility levy would raise special difficulty in the context of presenting the arguments for agricultural reform in the United Kingdom.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a short discussion, said that the special European Council on 11/12 February might well prove an unsatisfactory occasion if a Franco-German alliance persisted and attitudes were influenced by electoral preoccupations. However, we should resolutely resist any attempts to bulldoze through an unsatisfactory agreement. Additional resources would require unanimity. We should stick to our guns and maintain the pressure for reform.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

Cabinet Office

28 January 1988

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