PRIME MINISTER

SCOTLAND AND THE REVIEW OF THE NHS

Please see the letter from the Scottish Office below which seeks advice on the reply to a letter from Donald Dewar about Mr. Rifkind's role in the NHS Review.

It would be possible for Mr. Rifkind to give Mr. Dewar a brush-off by saying that the organisation of the Government's NHS Review is a matter for the Government and that he is not going to comment further. But I can understand why Mr. Rifkind would feel that such a reply would be unsatisfactory. He therefore proposes a three-part reply:

(i) "All the relevant Departments, including his own, were making an input to the Government's Review of the Health Service".

This sentence would only be true if you accept Mr. Rifkind's suggestion that he should submit, for the consideration of the Ministerial Group, a paper relating to the Scottish health scene. Since the Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices are also "relevant Departments", they too would need to be able to offer suggestions relating to the Welsh and Northern Irish health scenes respectively.

Content with this? Yes ok

(ii) "It was a Review by the Government as a whole but there was nothing unusual in a smaller group of Ministers having an initial go at a subject but before it was considered more widely."

Much less defensive

This sentence is very much a matter of political judgement. It suggests that Mr. Rifkind is not one of the "smaller group of Ministers"; and this could lead to embarrassment that the Scottish dimension was not being properly considered. It might be better simply to say, if pressed on this aspect, that

the Secretary of State for Scotland would, in the normal way, contribute to the discussions and decisions on the NHS in Scotland.

Which approach do you prefer?

(iii) "Consultations on implementation will be likely to follow announcement of the results of the Government's Review."

I do not think that Mr. Rifkind should say this unless Mr. Moore has already given such an undertaking. There may well be consultations on major aspects of the outcome of the Review. But there may be some minor items which the Government will proceed to implement without formal consultations. To give the undertaking suggested by Mr. Rifkind - which so far as we know you have not given hitherto - might tie the Government's hand. In any event, it is not necessary for the reply to Mr. Dewar.

Agree not to refer to consultations on implementation unless Mr. Moore has already given such an undertaking?

N.L.W

N. L. WICKS

18 March 1988

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