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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 July 1980

Dear Paul,

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONERS

The Prime Minister held a meeting this morning to discuss possible Labour candidates for the second of the two British posts of the European Commission. The Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong were present.

It was agreed that Mr. Fred Mulley, whose name had been put forward by Mr. Callaghan was not a credible candidate. His recent heart attack had been very severe and it was doubtful whether he was any longer up to the job. The names of a considerable number of other candidates were considered. It was agreed that the strongest candidate was Mr. Joel Barnett. He had told Mr. Callaghan that he did not wish to be considered but it was possible that he might be persuaded to allow his name to go forward if he were guaranteed the budget post on the Commission. It was agreed that the Chief Whip would talk to Mr. Barnett to establish his precise views.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that if Mr. Barnett were interested, there might be something to be said for speaking to M. Gaston Thorn to establish whether he could give any assurance that the UK would retain the budget post. It was recognised that M. Thorn would probably find it difficult to give an assurance.

The Prime Minister said that if Mr. Barnett did not wish to be a candidate, she would probably want to offer the post to Mrs. Shirley Williams. Mrs. Williams would probably not want to be a candidate, but it would be right that she should have been given the refusal.

I am sending copies of this letter to Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

Richard Alexander

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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