

RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING AT 1430 ON 29 JUNE 1983 AT
10 DOWNING STREET

Present:

The Prime Minister	Mrs. Sheila Quinn (President)
Secretary of State for Social Services	Mr. A. Giles (Chairman of Council)
Minister for Health	Mr. Ian Hargreaves (Chairman of Committee on Labour Relations)
Mrs. Poole	Mr. James Smith (Chairman of Representative Body)
Mr. Scholar	Mr. Trevor Clay (General Secretary)
Mr. Flesher	Ms. Sally Cowrie (Director of Labour Relations/Legal Dept.)

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Mrs. Quinn said that no-one could doubt the Government's commitment to the National Health Service and to the Review Body announced by the Secretary of State in November 1982. The Royal College of Nursing were enthusiastic about such a body; they were nevertheless grateful for the opportunity to argue that its terms of reference should be limited to professionally qualified and trained nurses. The RCN represented 60% of such nursing staff and there was a very strong feeling on this issue amongst their membership. Mr. Giles said that the RCN's long term aim was to establish a fully professional nursing service. There was a distinction between professionally qualified nurses and auxiliaries who are unqualified. Auxiliaries were not nurses; they always had to work under supervision. To confuse the two by including them under the same Review Body arrangements would be a disservice to the cause of a professional nursing service. Mr. Clay emphasised that the RCN was a trade union but a professional trade union. It was very different from the unions representing unqualified nursing staff. The RCN believed it to be vital to remove nurses' pay from the arena of industrial bargaining and indeed successive votes of the membership of the College had shown increasing majorities against any

/ possibility

possibility of industrial action. Other unions did not take this view and it was therefore essential for the membership of the RCN to be treated separately. To include in the Review Body auxiliaries whose unions would reserve the right to take industrial action would start the new arrangements, which in themselves were an enormous advance, on an entirely wrong footing.

In response the Prime Minister said that in previous discussions including that of 21 December 1981 the RCN had sought new arrangements for the determination of nurses' pay on behalf of nurses as a whole rather than simply those with professional qualifications. Accordingly the search for such arrangements had been based on the assumption that they would encompass all those groups covered by the Nurses' and Midwives' Whitley Council. That assumption had also informed the Secretary of State's announcement on 9 November. While the Prime Minister understood the distinction drawn by the RCN therefore and indeed recognised the vital part they had played in maintaining patient care during the NHS strike, to renege upon the undertaking which had been given would be seen as a breach of faith.

Mrs. Poole commented that there were other arguments in favour of a comprehensive Review Body. If nursing auxiliaries were separated from the rest of the nursing staff in their ward teams for the purposes of pay determination, difficulties of authority and responsibility for senior nursing staff could be created as had happened in similar cases such as operating theatre staff.

On the question of industrial action, the Prime Minister said that she recognised the force of the RCN's case. Indeed the purpose of the Review Body was to provide equitable arrangements for those who had refused to prejudice patient care by taking industrial action. The Secretary of State's statement in the House of Commons had envisaged that the new arrangements would apply to "skilled and dedicated staff" who did not use industrial muscle to secure their ends. It was implicit in that statement that the groups covered by the Review Body should abjure industrial action; it should perhaps now be made explicitly

a precondition of the new arrangements that staff involved should give up their right to take industrial action. Such a result would bring the auxiliaries closer to the RCN's own professional ethos and was therefore highly desirable in itself. Mr. Clay and other members of the delegation said that while they would favour an extension of the RCN's own attitude to professional ethics, there was considerable doubt as to whether the other unions involved such as NUPE and COHSE understood that ^{there was a} "no industrial action" condition for the establishment of the Review Body [redacted] implicit in the Secretary of State's statement. Moreover were such a condition to be made explicit there was every prospect that they would refuse to co-operate with the new arrangements. Indeed COHSE itself had voted against the Review Body and the settlement to the NHS dispute of which it formed part. To insist on an explicit renunciation of industrial action as a precondition of the establishment of the Review Body might well prevent it from getting off the ground. This was particularly so since the traditional unions did not represent only unqualified staff; COHSE for example represented a considerable number of professionally qualified nurses. A precondition might therefore not simply limit the ambit of the Review Body to professionally qualified nurses which was what the RCN sought but wreck it altogether.

The Secretary of State for Social Services said that whether or not a renunciation of industrial action was a precondition for the establishment of the Review Body, there could be no doubt that serious industrial action was incompatible with the continuation of Review Body arrangements which were extremely exceptional and based upon the need to provide an equitable system for dedicated staff. In practice therefore staff who benefited from a Review Body would be reluctant to take industrial action although they might not be prepared to abandon in principle their right to take industrial action.

Mr. Clay said that he hoped the Government would give further consideration to the question of preconditions for the Review Body. The RCN was anxious above all to ensure that the new arrangements came into effect: nothing should be allowed to interfere with that objective which would be a very considerable step forward for nurses.

/ Concluding

Concluding the meeting the Prime Minister said that the Government could not go back on the undertaking which had been given to all nursing staff at her meeting in December 1981. There was however no reason why within the scope of a single Review Body separate arrangements could not be made for the professionally qualified staff represented by the RCN for example by the separate submission of evidence. Such a procedure should meet the valid points which the delegation had made about the distinction between qualified and unqualified staff. On the question of whether renunciation of industrial action should be made an explicit or implicit precondition of the establishment of the Review Body, the Government would consider the position further in the light of the discussion. The Prime Minister said that she was grateful for the way in which the delegation had presented the views of the College.

The meeting ended at 1530 hours.

29 June 1983

SUBJECT

File

Brc/DA

cc MASTER



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 June 1983

Dear Steve,

I attach a record of the meeting which the Prime Minister had with representatives of the Royal College of Nursing today. Also attached are briefing notes left by the delegation with the Prime Minister at the end of the meeting.

I am sending a copy of this letter and the record to John Kerr (HM Treasury), Barnaby Shaw (Department of Employment), Muir Russell (Scottish Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,
Tim Flesher*

(Tim Flesher)

Steve Godber, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security

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