



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister ①

Sir Keith Joseph sounded you out on a review of high energy particle physics. He has consulted the Foreign Secretary who predictably is unhappy. (Sir Keith has sent you copies of this exchange of correspondence).

Dr Nicholson supports review and proposals for handling it

Agree?

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 March 1984

Dear Elizabeth,

Review of High Energy Particle Physics

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 5 March proposing a review of high energy particle physics to be conducted by a group under the chairmanship of Sir John Kendrew. She has noted the Foreign Secretary's concerns and recognises that our partners in CERN will need to be handled with care. Nevertheless, she believes a review is right and agrees that the assurances sought by Sir David Phillips and Professor Kingman should be given. Unless scientists are assured that savings identified by the review are available for redeployment elsewhere in the Science Budget, there is unlikely to be a rigorous study of priorities.

The Prime Minister has noted the steps which your Secretary of State proposes to take in order to minimise misunderstandings and misrepresentation. She agrees that no announcement should be made until after 20 March and she attaches importance to the proposal to give warning before the announcement to Ministers in CERN member states and to the CERN Director.

I am copying this letter to Private Secretaries to members of Cabinet, Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office) and Dr. Nicholson (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Andrew Turnbull

Andrew Turnbull

Miss C.E. Hodkinson,
Department of Education and Science.

6 March 1984

PRIME MINISTER

PROPOSED REVIEW OF HIGH ENERGY PARTICLE PHYSICS

I strongly support, indeed I have been urging for some time, a review of the UK's participation in high energy particle physics.

2. At a time when the Research Councils are having to reassess their priorities, reallocate their resources and cut back some parts of their research, it would be quite wrong to apply double standards and allow High Energy Particle Physics to be sacrosanct simply because most of the work is done on an international collaborative basis.

3. I believe the review will be welcomed by most of the scientific community in the UK and, notwithstanding the inevitable posturing by some European Governments, by much of the scientific community abroad as well. The MRC showed in their recent review of the UK's participation in the European Molecular Biology Laboratory that it is perfectly possible to review our role in a European collaborative activity and to gain respect and understanding for our position in doing so.

4. The proposed membership of the Working Party is excellent - Sir John Kendrew himself and most of the members are well-known and revered in Europe. There will be deep interest in, and respect for, the results of their deliberations.

5. I believe the two assurances sought by Sir David Phillips and Professor Kingman are eminently reasonable. An automatic confiscation of funds by Treasury from any reduced or discontinued area of research would make reassessment of

priorities and reallocation of funds towards priority growth areas in science impossible - yet this is the discipline which the Secretary of State has repeatedly urged on Research Councils.

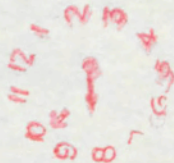
6. Withdrawal from CERN must be contemplated as one option on completion of the study - it would be unreal to exclude it. Personally I doubt that it will come to that. More likely will be recommendations to improve the cost-effectiveness of CERN (you've seen the gold plating yourself) and, crucially, to slow down the pace and hence the rate of spend on this area of research. There is no reason why the tax-payers of Europe and the USA should have to fund a private race between two scientific cliques carried out at a pace determined largely by their own curiosity and arrogance. I expect the Working Party to recommend a reduced rate of spend to correspond with a better judgement of the value of this area of science vis-à-vis competitive areas.

7. Handling this issue will be crucial from the point of view of public perception at home and abroad. I welcome the Secretary of State's proposal to establish a shadow group of officials to advise Ministers on this. I would be happy to be part of it and to keep you informed of the progress of the review.

8. I am copying this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.

RSN.
ROBIN B NICHOLSON
Chief Scientific Adviser

-7 MAR 1984



6 March 1984

MR TURNBULL

file

HIGH ENERGY PARTICLE PHYSICS: REVIEW

Keith Joseph's plan to review spending on CERN seems admirable.

We are not competent to comment on the scientific issues involved: you will have a note from Robin Nicholson on that. But we do wish to support the proposal that the exercise should be regarded as a basis for redistribution within the Science Vote, rather than as a means of reducing spending.

We should certainly contain - and, if possible, reduce - spending on science. But we should not use the review as a vehicle because, if we do, the scientists will become defensive, and will refuse to tell us what we need to know - viz, whether whatever funds we do allot would be better spent on CERN or on other scientific ventures.

We suggest that the Prime Minister should agree to a review on the terms that Keith Joseph proposes.

Oliver Letwin

OLIVER LETWIN