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FROM: CHIEF SECRETARY
8 March 1984

PRIME MINISTER

PROPOSED REVIEW OF HIGH ENERGY PARTICLE PHYSICS

I have seen a copy of Keith Joseph's minute to you of 5 March.

I very much welcome the ABRC's initiative. It is to the credit of the scientific community, and can do its cause with Government nothing but good, that it should be ready to conduct a vigorous appraisal of the costs and benefits of our present commitment of a sizeable proportion of the science budget to this area of activity.

I would be content for you to give the first of the assurances which Sir David Phillips and Professor Kingman seek - indeed the review would have little point if radical options for our involvement in CERN were off the agenda - and at least to enter fully into the spirit of the second. The size of the science budget will, of course, remain an issue for successive Public Expenditure Surveys. One cannot predict what factors we or our successors will consider relevant to future decisions, but we will need inter alia to take a view about the value of the activities supported by the science budget at the time. To the extent that the balance of those activities would be affected by a decision to scale down or abandon our involvement in high energy particle physics, that view might be affected also at the margin - one way or the other. I do not think it is possible, therefore, to state categorically that the science budget would be precisely the same whether or not we ended our present commitment to high energy particle physics; and I am sure that ABRC and SERC will understand this. (They will recall, too, that the increase in the budget agreed in the 1983 Survey was specifically related to the increased costs of participation in CERN.)

What I can say is that I view the proposed study as an exercise in obtaining the best value for money from a given level of resources for scientific research. If it were to conclude that, within those resources, the share allocated to high energy particle physics should be reduced, I would certainly not seek to exploit such a finding as an argument for cutting the science budget as a whole.

I should add that I hope the study will look not only at options for our involvement with CERN but also at the value for money obtained from the £20 million a year being spent on other high



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energy particle physics work. And in this we need to consider not only matters of high scientific policy but also such mundane issues as the best use of accommodation and staff, which could prove no less productive.

I should be very happy for Treasury officials to take part in the proposed 'shadow' group.

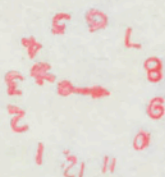
Copies of this letter go to other members of Cabinet, Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr Nicholson.

PR

PETER REES

SCIENCE + TECH: Science Base

Sept 83



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