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Bentley

PRIME MINISTER

FRENCH PRIME MINISTER'S ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE

I have seen the recent correspondence on this and felt I should add a comment - as seen from DOE - to the advice which the Foreign Secretary is providing.

We are seeing a great proliferation of international meetings on the environment. Some of them are simply part of the bandwagon effect and we shall have to be selective about supporting them. But some - and I suspect M. Rocard's proposed conference may be becoming one - are on to real points and we need to think carefully about our approach.

The ozone layer and climate change are the two big global environmental issues. We have highlighted ozone with our conference. The French, no doubt for a mixture of motives, have gone for climate change. We have to support that element of their proposal which seeks to give leadership, and add political momentum, to ongoing research work and the search for solutions.

But they have gone further and made a specific proposal for a new supranational body, equipped with powers of sanction and compensation. That cannot be right; and once properly examined it would be attractive only to those who stand to gain in the developing world, while pretty unattractive to those who would have to pay.

Furthermore, UNEP is already active in this field and a new body would sit uneasily beside it.

An obvious solution is to reinforce UNEP for tackling the major tasks it faces. But strengthening UNEP is not a road to take without a lot of thought. Most people with first hand experience of UNEP would think twice about giving it expanded powers, since it is



essentially a co-ordinating body and runs in a rather idiosyncratic way. Ideas of this kind need careful analysis and discussion over a period of time.

The gathering support for the Hague conference means, I think, that we cannot ignore it. The personal message you have received from Mr Lubbers reinforces that view. If in discussion on 8 February M. Rocard seemed prepared to concentrate on the leadership and political momentum aspects of his Declaration, and to drop the institutional angle, then there may even be a case for you to attend yourself. He would still have a proposal that would fit well with developing ideas on sustainable development and with the IPCC's work on climate change. But he should be left in no doubt that we are not prepared to move quickly to international bodies with teeth; and that we would expect some other major players in the game to have equally strong (though possibly different) reservations.

I am copying this minute to the Foreign Secretary.

NR

7 February 1989



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