

Pass Office: to see and return please.

Prime Minister (2)

It seems to me that the MRC's tactics are less than worthy. But we should not be blackmailed.

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~~3 August 1984~~

MR DAVID BARCLAY, NO 10

DMB
3/8

MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

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I have noted from your minute of 2 August to Elizabeth Hodgkinson that the Prime Minister has agreed to Lord Jellicoe's request for a meeting on the Medical Research Council, and that this will probably take place in September.

My Secretariat will be in touch with the DES over the preparation of a brief for the Prime Minister, and I may well wish to provide some additional comments to her.

Following our telephone conversation on Monday, I did indicate to Sir James Gowans that in response to the questions which will undoubtedly be put to him when the MRC project finance decisions are known, he could indicate that his Chairman had requested a meeting with the Prime Minister and that he understood the Prime Minister agreed to see the Chairman but that the meeting would probably not take place until September. I also pointed out to Sir James the dangers of stoking up fires on this subject in the media. He completely understands the point and will do the best he can to avoid this problem. However, he made clear to me that the first reaction of some of the people who receive letters of rejection of their grant application shortly will be to communicate with the Press and there is nothing he can do to stop this. I understand that of the 15 to 20 rejection letters which are going out, a few are in emotive areas such as research on depression and tuberculosis. Some sections of the Press may well make a field day of this as they did a few weeks ago on the decision not to support the Unit in Cambridge working on "cot deaths" even though that decision was taken purely on scientific grounds.

ROBIN B NICHOLSON
Chief Scientific Adviser

RBN