



NOTE OF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING, FRIDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 1982

Present: Prime Minister  
Lord President of the Council  
Secretary of State for Education and Science  
Secretary of State for Social Services  
Secretary of State for Employment  
Chairman of the Party  
Minister of State, Treasury (Mr Wakeham)  
Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary  
Mr Lawson, Marketing Director, Conservative Central Office  
Mr Cropper, Conservative Research Department (and  
Research Department staff)  
Mr Ward, Lord President of the Council's office

Presentation of Social Security Policies

The Committee considered the revised paper on the presentation of Social Security policies. The following points were made in discussion:

- (a) The paper would benefit from additional material on the NHS, with a more positive presentation of how much the Government had done to protect the NHS and Social Security system in a period of recession.
- (b) There were, of course, problems in the NHS which had still to be resolved in the longer term. The paper should acknowledge the existence of these longer term problems in an additional paragraph which would give a balanced exposition of the realities. But it should be kept in mind that the



purpose of these papers, and indeed of the Committee itself, was to provide Ministers with speaking guidance on policy issues, with information on policy achievements in other departments, and to bring together the work of the Party organisations and the Government on policy presentation and promotion, rather than policy analysis.

(c) It was agreed that the paper was a valuable quarry of useful facts which would be very helpful both to Ministers and to their special advisers who in practice would research the material for them.

(d) It was agreed that at the earliest opportunity Central Office should issue a briefing note on the Government's policy achievements in respect of the NHS.

The Committee agreed that the paper, once it had been revised, in the light of this discussion, should be circulated to Ministers by the Lord President of the Council.

#### Presentation of Education Policies

Introducing a revised paper on the presentation of education policies, the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that in many respects there was a good story to tell. Contary to the public perception education expenditure per capita had not been cut. There was no ground for concern with the





quality of at least the top half of school leavers. But there was evidence, albeit much of it anecdotal, to suggest that standards among the lower half of the school leaving population were far lower than desirable. The reasons were qualitative not quantitative and had much to do with the quality of teachers as well as parental attitudes. This was one reason why his Department was making efforts to shift the emphasis from academic studies to practical studies for those not academically inclined. In discussion, the following main points were made:

(a) The paper should high-light, and preferably at the beginning, the Government's record on education expenditure per capita and on the pupil/teacher ratio compared with earlier years. But the paper should equally make it clear that money could not buy quality.

(b) The Government had an excellent record on the cash provision for education in a time of recession. The problem of higher standards could not be solved by money and, presentationally, there was much to be said for shifting the ground of argument to the wider issues of standards generally.

The Committee agreed, that subject to revision in the light of this discussion, the paper should be distributed to Ministers by the Lord President of the Council.





Note by the Minister of State, Treasury

(a) Introducing his note, the Minister of State, Treasury, said that he was particularly concerned to improve the presentation of the Government's policy towards the Nationalised Industries. He feared that the public perception was that the Government was selling off national assets to balance the books. This, of course, was a gross mis-understanding of the reasons for privatisation policies which were based on the Government's determination to make the industries more efficient, more responsive to their customers, and better placed for sound expansion. In discussion, it was further noted that a useful presentational point was the unsuitability of politicians and Civil Servants to supervise large industrial undertakings, but that although the policy concept was clear and convincing the language lacked appeal; privatisation was an ugly word. More emphasis should be put on the underlying significance on the shift of policies towards National Industries since the Government came into office but this would most helpfully be done in a wider context. It was agreed that Central Office's draft paper on the presentation of industrial policies should be expanded to take account of the Minister of State's, Treasury, suggestions. It should also include material on help to the new industries. The Minister of State, Treasury, was asked to give guidance to the author on how this might be done; to ensure that the Secretary of State for Industry and his ministerial colleagues were closely involved; and the Marketing Director, Central Office, should advise on the question of a more appealing presentational approach.





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(b) The Committee also considered the Treasury, suggestion for aspects of international affairs. At the point was made that it would concentrate on defence and nuclear no doubt - as media treatment of had demonstrated - of the need for public acceptance of the Government's Trident decision. Opponents were able to range widely in their criticism and to quote in their support sensible people who were concerned with conventional capabilities or industrial implications. The CND campaign was likely to constitute a serious and continuing problem. A great deal of valuable material had already been issued by the Government to explain its decisions in this area and Conservative Research Department should draw on what was already available in the preparation of a consolidated paper on the presentation of defence and nuclear policies. At the same time, it had to be recognised that the civil nuclear programme, which would involve the Government in some major decisions, aroused opposition both from environmentalists and from those already opposed to military aspects of nuclear policy. It was important that the Government's position be sustained across a wide front and it was therefore agreed that a paper should be prepared on the presentation of the Government's civil nuclear programme. The Minister of State, Treasury, was asked to take this up with the Secretary of State for Energy and ask him to take the lead; he would of course require inputs from other departments since the paper must cover medical, transport, and environmental aspects. There must be a scientific input and Professor Lewis' name was mentioned. It was recalled that the then Chairman of UKAEA had some years ago dealt very effectively with ill-informed criticism of the civil nuclear programme and the Chief Press Secretary was asked to look up the text and make it available.





(b) The Committee also considered the Minister of State's, Treasury, suggestion for papers on presentation of aspects of international affairs policy. In discussion, the point was made that it would be best for the moment to concentrate on defence and nuclear policy areas. There was no doubt - as media treatment of the recent Coulport announcement had demonstrated - of the need for continuous efforts to secure public acceptance of the Government's Trident decision. Opponents were able to range widely in their criticism and to quote in their support sensible people who were concerned with eg conventional capabilities or industrial implications. The CND campaign was likely to constitute a serious and continuing problem. A great deal of valuable material had already been issued by the Government to explain its decisions in this area and Conservative Research Department should draw on what was already available in the preparation of a consolidated paper on the presentation of defence and nuclear policies. At the same time, it had to be recognised that the civil nuclear programme, which would involve the Government in some major decisions, aroused opposition both from environmentalists and from those already opposed to military aspects of nuclear policy. It was important that the Government's position be sustained across a wide front and it was therefore agreed that a paper should be prepared on the presentation of the Government's civil nuclear programme. The Minister of State, Treasury, was asked to take this up with the Secretary of State for Energy and ask him to take the lead; he would of course require inputs from other departments since the paper must cover medical, transport, and environmental aspects. There must be a scientific input and Professor Lewis' name was mentioned. It was recalled that the then Chairman of UKAEA had some years ago dealt very effectively with ill-informed criticism of the civil nuclear programme and the Chief Press Secretary was asked to look up the text and make it available.





### Presentational Issues for the Autumn

The Committee had before it a note by the Chief Press Secretary. On the four main presentational issues identified in the paper, pay would become a major issue with the opening of the iners negotiations, employment legislation would shortly be the subject of a Green Paper, and the EC Budget would clearly present difficult presentational problems. But it was likely that the Opposition Parties would concentrate their attention on the economy (while for its part the Government must emphasise the importance of wealth creation.) In discussion further points were made:

(a) The Government had to face the possibility that at the time of the next General Election unemployment would be at or close to the current figure of about three million and that the Government's opponents would concentrate on this. There was a danger that concentration on this one issue could overwhelm much else that was positive. The issue had to be defused and the causes properly understood in the public mind. It was agreed that the Chairman of the Party would take the lead in a wholly separate study assisted by the Secretary of State for Employment, the Lord President of the Council, Minister of State, Treasury, with other Ministers and Party officials as necessary and including a personal representative of the Prime Minister.

(b) It was noted that the Government had consistently tried to keep it in the public mind that the causes of unemployment were deep rooted and had much to do with the historical attitudes and behaviour of trade unions. Certainly the Labour Party had been able to make much less of the issue than might otherwise have been expected.





(c) The Secretary of State for Employment said he would like to take this opportunity of reminding his colleagues that the October unemployment figures would be the last to be published on the present basis. Thereafter, the figures would be published on the basis of voluntary registration. The effect, unavoidably, would be to reduce the totals, by a magnitude yet to be defined, and give rise to criticism of misrepresentation. In an effort to forestall the obvious question, he had decided that two sets of figures should be published in October so that comparisons could be made between the two systems.

Diary of Events

In discussing the Chief Press Secretary's diary of events, it was noted that the launching of Channel 4 on November 2 and later the launching of Breakfast TV would bring major new demands on ministerial time. Ministers must be selective in responding to invitations from the new ventures. It was agreed that the Chief Press Secretary would prepare a paper on this issue for the Lord President of the Council who would arrange for its circulation to Cabinet.

Date of Next Meeting

To be notified.

Distribution

Those present; Secretary of State for Scotland, Chief Secretary, Treasury.