

Extract from the note of the meeting between the Prime Minister  
and the Whips on Wednesday, 8 March 1978

(Top copy filed on Prime Minister, June 1975)

Immigration. There was extensive discussion on the subject of immigration. It was claimed that many Asian immigrants were very frightened. There was bitter opposition to the tactics adopted by Mrs. Thatcher, for instance among people like the clergy and others occupying the middle ground of society, and that resentment should be exploited by the Government. Mrs. Thatcher should be pressed all the time about what her policies on immigration would really involve. Meanwhile, the Government should reassure the immigrant communities. It was argued that immigration was of very great interest to people, even in areas where there were very few immigrants. Immigration would be a major issue whatever was done. There was a need to be positive and spell out clear policies and steal Mrs. Thatcher's clothes, at least to the extent of not allowing her all the initiative. It was argued that the issue of immigration dictated that the Lambeth Central by-election should be held as quickly as possible: the longer the delay, the worse the exploitation of the immigration issue would become. (There was a division of view about the desirability of an early by-election in Lambeth or one to be held after the local government elections; the Prime Minister assured the Whips that very careful consideration was being given to the timing of both the Lambeth Central and Garscadden by-elections.)