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Govt Mach July '99 - Director
of Overseas
Surveys

NOTE OF DISCUSSIONS ON DISPERSAL POLICY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON
WEDNESDAY 18 JULY

Present: Prime Minister
Secretary of State for Scotland
Minister of State, Civil Service Department
Mr. Ian Gow
Mr. Mike Pattison

The Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of State at the Civil Service Department met the Prime Minister in preparation for a discussion with the Scottish Group of Conservative backbench MPs.

Mr. Younger pointed out that the brief prepared by the CSD did not give sufficient weight to the longer term benefits offered by dispersal, but placed unreasonable emphasis on the immediate costs. The Prime Minister asked what posts would remain for dispersal to Scotland if the Ministry of Defence jobs coming from provincial centres in England were excluded. Mr. Channon said that there would be a number of defence jobs, and also 650 ODA jobs, with 350 jobs coming later with the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. The Prime Minister asked about the work of this organisation. Mr. Channon said that its workload was undoubtedly declining, and there was fierce resistance to the proposed move because of the loss of specialised staff. The Prime Minister asked whether it should not be abolished rather than dispersed.

The Prime Minister asked when a statement was scheduled on dispersal. Mr. Channon said that this was tentatively set for Tuesday. Mr. Younger said that this was quite unreasonable, as E Committee was only scheduled to reach a decision on Tuesday and the Government could not be committed to a statement when the outcome of the discussion was difficult to predict. Mr. Channon said there was strong pressure for a decision on Tuesday. All the regional centres which expected to benefit from dispersal were demanding to be put out of their misery one way or another. Mr. Younger insisted that Tuesday was unreasonably early for a statement.

/The Prime Minister

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