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To: PRIME MINISTER

7 September 1982

From: JOHN SPARROW

Family Policy Group

1. I attach my paper for your Group meeting on Friday.
2. I am sending copies to the other members of the Group and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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Att

ee W Paterson

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FAMILY POLICY GROUP

Note by the Head of the Central Policy Review Staff

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1. The prosperity of a nation and the welfare of the individuals who compose it depend ultimately on the spirit of its people - their readiness to assume responsibility for their own actions, their willingness to play an active role in shaping their own lives and in determining the quality of their physical and moral environment, and their confidence in their ability to deal successfully with the inevitable exigencies of human life. For a variety of reasons, this spirit of individual responsibility, confidence and self-discipline has been eroded in Britain over recent decades. The aim of the Family Policy Group must be to reverse this process.

2. The symptoms of this loss of confidence and sense of responsibility are clear. They may be seen in the tendency to blame others - the Government, the Council, the boss, the unions, the media - for one's own predicament and to expect others, including the growing army of 'professionals' who now appear to take many of the key decisions affecting people's lives, to get one out of it. They may be seen in the tendency to denigrate or even deny the role which individuals may have played in achieving conspicuous success in their particular fields of endeavour and hence, for example, to believe that such individuals should be subjected to penal taxation aimed at preventing them from enjoying the fruits of that success or from passing these on to their families. They may be seen also in the tendency to excuse acts of teenage delinquency and vandalism as either the inevitable product of deprivation or as part of the normal process of growing up. Finally, they may be seen in such commonly held beliefs as that teachers should not exert pressure on pupils to achieve their full potential lest they discourage them, that parents should not discipline their children lest they alienate them and that employers should not resist the demands of their unions lest they provoke them. In other

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words, they may be seen in the tendency to deny to those in authority their raison d'être and, with it, their right to insist on the highest standards.

3. It will not be easy for the Government to reverse a process which has been going on for many years and to modify collectivist beliefs and attitudes which are now ingrained in large numbers of the population. All that the Government can do is to try to encourage - by example, by exhortation and, where necessary and appropriate, by legislation - the establishment of those conditions in which a spirit of individual responsibility and self-reliance can flourish. To be successful, it must do this constructively and without appearing to threaten those aspects of the present welfare state arrangements which guarantee that no one in Britain today need suffer the extremes of poverty and deprivation to which earlier generations were vulnerable. In short, the aim of the Family Policy Group should be to produce a society in which the State reinforces and underpins individual initiative rather than discouraging and replacing it.

4. To this end, the Group will have to examine a great many aspects of society and, in respect of each of these, decide -

(i) What action the Government can take to encourage the objectives of personal responsibility and initiative. This will involve examining the results of recent research and looking to other countries for suggestions as well as reviewing existing Departmental plans and programmes.

(ii) How such action would affect other aspects of the activity being studied: e.g. is there a risk that measures directed at increasing the scope for personal responsibility in a particular field might lead to losses on other measures of welfare or well-being?

THE FAMILY AND THE HOME

5. The family lies at the heart of our society and any programme aimed at strengthening the spirit of individual responsibility and initiative in

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society must begin here. We must aim to strengthen the family as the primary unit of support for the individual and, to this end, we must seek to strengthen also the ties which bind the generations together.

6. For a variety of reasons including greater social and geographical mobility, these ties are much weaker today than they once were. Divorce is no longer regarded as something to be avoided at all costs. But divorce itself imposes a cost, particularly on the children. Of the children born today, one-fifth will see their parents divorce before they reach their sixteenth birthday. Many of these children will grow up with only a single parent. There is no simple explanation for the present high rate of divorce nor is it clear what the Government can do about it. But there may be some steps which can be taken to counter this phenomenon. For example, it is clear that early marriages are more likely to end in divorce than later ones. (It has been established that marriages in which the bride is in her teens are twice as likely to end in divorce as those in which the bride is between 20 and 24 years of age and four times as likely to end in divorce as those in which she is between 25 and 29.) Given this, it would seem worth considering what the Government could do to encourage later marriage, perhaps by teaching young people more about the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood and the risks of early marriage.

7. Even in 'successful' marriages, however, there are pressures which tend to weaken the family as a supportive unit. In the period between 1971 and 1979, the proportion of women with dependent children who were working rose from 41 per cent to 52 per cent. It is not known how many of these mothers would have preferred to stay at home to look after their children but we must use the tax/benefit system to help those who wish to do so. On the other hand, where both mother and father choose to go out to work, we must consider how best to provide substitutes for parental care in order to ease the problem of 'latch-key' children. Such substitutes might include nursery classes and crèches and perhaps also some encouragement through the tax/benefit system to enable working parents to employ someone else to care for their children for at least part of the day.

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8. Children are not the only members of a family who need support and companionship. There are problems also at the other end of the age spectrum. During the last twenty years, the number of elderly has increased by one-third so that in 1981 there were 8.1 million people aged 65 or over in the United Kingdom. The increasing trend in numbers of retired people has levelled off in recent years, but there is a continuing steady increase in the number of the 'very aged'. Between 1981 and 2001, it is estimated that the number of people over 85 will increase by about 50 per cent. Clearly the State will not be able to assume full responsibility for caring for the majority of these people. Whatever scarce public resources are available should go to those most in need such as those without families to look after them, the handicapped, the seriously ill. For the rest, we must encourage families to take care of their own elderly, not simply by exhortation, but also by the provision of material help through the tax/benefit systems.

9. A confident and self-reliant family needs a home in which it can take pride. House ownership is the most effective way of providing this, but tenants too, should be able to take pride in their homes. To this end, they must have some say in the way their homes and the physical environment surrounding them are managed. We have all seen housing estates, not only in the inner cities, where vandalism seems almost to be invited. Too often these estates, although built (often recently) to high architectural and engineering standards, are totally lacking in human terms. They have deteriorated to their present condition partly because of this and partly because of the insensitive housing management policies of the local authority. The Government has already made a start in tackling this problem; the Family Policy Group should ensure that this work is given greater priority.

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EDUCATION

10. It would be unrealistic to expect parents to be able to instil in their children the values of self-reliance, excellence and individual initiative unless these values are found also in the schools. To this end, teachers must be persuaded of the benefits of these values and of the importance of passing them on to their pupils. They must be persuaded also of the importance of maintaining discipline in the classroom, of teaching pupils how to work on their own and of insisting on the highest standards in relation to the basic skills such as reading, writing and simple mathematics. This is likely to require a radical rethinking of our present system of teacher training and more involvement by the Government in curriculum matters than has hitherto been considered appropriate.

11. At the higher levels of education, we must take steps to get students to appreciate the true cost of their education and thus to make the most of their opportunities. Raising tuition fees to cover a higher proportion of the costs of their courses might be a way of doing this, as would be the introduction of student loans in place of grants.

12. Consideration should be given also to how far the present education system reduces social mobility and reinforces the rigidities of the class structure as compared with the old grammar-school system. The aim of the education system must be to enable all young people to realise their full potential to the benefit of themselves and the nation as a whole and to encourage them to make every effort to do so.

THE WORK PLACE

13. The values of self-reliance and individual initiative must be encouraged in the work place, too. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer points out in his paper, action is already in hand to encourage new and small businesses, management enterprise and wider ownership. These developments must be pursued with vigour as should others directed at

- enabling individuals to take more responsibility for their own pension arrangements, thus increasing mobility among those with scarce managerial and entrepreneurial skills;

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- encouraging union members to play a more active role in their unions, e.g. by requiring secret ballots for union elections, etc;
- giving individual employees more of a stake in the prosperity of their enterprises through wider shareholdings;
- raising the level of skill and professionalism among managers by encouraging management training both at the start of a career and at intermediate stages until retirement;
- introducing direct communications between management and workforce, not via the unions.

PUBLIC ORDER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

14. The problems of law and order are to some extent being considered by a separate group under Home Office leadership. But we can not neglect this key area of society. The police are, of course, in the front line in the fight to maintain law and order and we must not undermine their confidence in carrying out this task. On the contrary, we must use every opportunity to strengthen the respect with which the police are held by all members of society. To this end, we must continue to ensure that the police are as well trained as possible, that all charges of corruption are investigated quickly and thoroughly and that the arrangements for dealing with complaints are accepted by the public as fair and impartial. It may also be worth reviewing the present arrangements for filling the top posts in the police service with a view not only to expanding the Graduate Entry Scheme but also to opening these important posts to direct recruitment from outside the service. This would enable the police to draw on the pool of experienced and able people who would be prepared to serve the community in this way.

15. But we cannot leave it to the police alone to ensure that the Queen's Peace is maintained. Efforts should be made to increase respect for the law not only among those who may be inclined to break it but also among the far greater number who appear to be indifferent to the lawbreaking that goes on around them every day. Attitudes to the "black economy" are relevant here; so also are public attitudes to vandalism and violence, child abuse, graffiti and litter. There may be scope for dealing with at least some forms of such anti-social behaviour through voluntary action; the

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Government may however have to play a more active role in dealing with the growth of pornography and sex shops and the amount of violence on television and in the press.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

16. A reliant and confident society is based on equality of opportunity and that theme should run through all our work. The present level of unemployment, particularly among the young, is a major obstacle to opportunity and the Government must continue, within its overall economic strategy, to develop cost-effective schemes for tackling it. For those without jobs, efforts must be made to prevent them from losing confidence in their own ability and sense of value. To this end, efforts should be made to help the unemployed to start businesses of their own, and to provide them with facilities and opportunities for leisure, recreation and the acquisition of new skills.

17. We must ensure also that our racial minority communities enjoy the same opportunities as those enjoyed by the rest of society so that they feel that they, too, are a part of this society and accept their full share of responsibility for ensuring its tranquility and well-being. Many of those who have recently arrived in this country are imbued with precisely the sorts of values which the Group is trying to encourage. We must ensure that they are not prevented by discrimination from enjoying the fruits of their skill, enterprise and initiative. In this context, it might be useful to review the effectiveness of the institutions set up in the 1970s to promote equality of opportunity; ie the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

18. Even as we move towards a society in which people have a strong sense of personal responsibility and in which they can control their own destiny within broader limits than is possible today, there will still be a need for the state to provide help for those individuals who cannot help themselves and who cannot get adequate help from family, friends or the local community. We must make it clear that we intend to continue to provide a 'safety-net' where required. Our objective must not be to dismantle the post-Beveridge welfare state, but to identify more clearly the purposes for which it was developed and to direct it to achieving these purposes more effectively.



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It should then be possible to provide those in real need with a more effective and generous support system than can be afforded now. We must also identify, and attempt to diminish, the factors which serve to discourage individuals from taking more responsibility for themselves and their families.

Cabinet Office

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