

M. R.
PRIME MINISTER

(F)

The Boundary Commission

I understand from Ian Gow that the Boundary Redistribution issue did not feature in your meeting with the Home Secretary etc this morning (Monday).

Consequently, I think you should be aware of the following facts in case you need to exert further pressure.

1. As you know, under the European Assembly Elections Act the Parliamentary Boundary Commission Report and the European Assembly Constituencies Report have to be presented to the Secretary of State at the same time.

An amendment to the 1978 ^{Act} Schedule 2, Section 2, would be required to change the picture.

2. Last Friday, 30th November, David Mitchell of our Legal Department at Central Office attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission. In the presence of a Labour Party representative he asked the Deputy Chairman, Sir Raymond Walton, for his opinion of the timetable in respect of the European Assembly recommendations. In his reply, Sir Raymond made it plain that it would take about 15 months to prepare the report on the European Assembly constituencies after the completion of the Parliamentary Report, and that it could even take longer, say 18 months. If this is the case and the two Reports are not divorced, the Home Secretary might not be able to present the recommendations to Parliament until the Autumn of 1983. True, we will know the Parliamentary recommendations by the spring of 1982, but they will be inoperative as long as they remain tied to Europe. Your General Election options will therefore be seriously hampered unless a simple Bill is brought forward to amend the Act.
3. It could be that the Boundary Commission are angered by John Drinkwater's imminent 'dismissal' following representations about political 'bias' from Merlyn Rees.
4. In any event a decision has to be made at some stage about the amendment. It looks as though you might have to go through with it, in which case is it more politic to do so soon, or in 1982?



Richard

3rd December 1979

(F)

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CONFIDENTIAL.

O.C.D. Mitchell
30th November 1979

Lord Thorneycroft
cc: A.S. Garner

BOUNDARY REDISTRIBUTION - ENGLAND

You will recall that last June I was approached by the Secretary of the Boundary Commission who wanted to know (quite unofficially) if we would be prepared to initiate an amendment to that section of the European Assembly Elections Act which required that the Parliamentary Boundary Commission Report and the European Assembly Constituencies Report be made the Secretary of State at the same time. This would require primary legislation. I was then told that having to present both Reports at once might delay the presentation of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission Report by six months.

This morning I attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission and I took the opportunity of asking the Deputy Chairman for his opinion of the timetable in respect of the European Assembly recommendations. In his reply he made it quite plain that he was of the opinion that it would take about 15 months to prepare the report on the European Assembly constituencies after the completion of the Parliamentary Report and that it would possibly take quite a lot longer, say, 18 months. This quite alters the picture as far as we are concerned because if the Parliamentary Report is not to be ready until Spring 1982, it may well mean that the Report, together with the European Assembly Report, will not be presented to the Home Secretary until the Autumn of 1983 and will not be put to Parliament until (say) November 1983. This will place all the parties at a serious disadvantage because there will scarcely be time to prepare the constituency organisations in time for a possible General Election in Spring 1984. We will know the recommendations which are to be made in respect of Parliamentary boundaries by the time that work begins on the European Assembly constituency redistribution, probably in Spring 1982, but will scarcely be able to start forming the new associations at that time for fear of a premature General Election or for fear of an even longer delay in the preparation of the European Assembly constituency recommendations.

Earlier this year we discussed with Mr. Whitelaw, Mr. Leon Brittan, Mr. Nicholas Edwards and Mr. George Younger whether we should seek to introduce legislation so that the Parliamentary Boundary recommendations could be made in advance of the European Assembly recommendations. At that time we were thinking in terms of a six month delay. In view of this morning's information I think we should consider the matter again as a matter of urgency.

OTW

30th November 1979

PERSONAL

I enclose a copy of a memorandum I have written this afternoon for the attention of Lord Thorneycroft. I was very surprised indeed this morning to hear Sir Raymond Walton say that he expected it to be 15 months or more after the Parliamentary Report had been completed before it would be possible to publish the European Assembly Constituency Report. This is quite contrary to what I had been told by Barnes who led me to believe that the interim might be up to six months.

I think you will agree that this alters the picture very much indeed as far as we are concerned and that fresh consideration should now be given as to whether we should produce a very small and simple bill to amend the relevant section of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978 (Schedule 2, Section 2). It was obvious from the remarks made by representatives of the Labour Party who were present at the meeting of the Boundary Commission this morning that the Labour Party organisation would be equally loathe to have to implement redistribution at such a very late stage in the life of the Parliament.

DM

O.C.D. Mitchell
Organisation & Legal Officer

Mr. Leon Brittan, QC, MP,
The House of Commons,
London, S.W.1.

(F)

PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND.

Recommendations to date

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	23.9.76	Inquiry 24.1.77,	2nd Recs. 28.4.77
CLEVELAND	20.1.77	4.7.77,	
SOMERSET	12.5.77	18.10.77,	
LANCASHIRE	12.5.77	20.9.77,	15.2.79
NORTHUMBERLAND	23.2.78	9.1.79,	
ESSEX	11.5.78	13.3.79,	
CHESHIRE	14.6.79	30.10.79,	
HERTFORDSHIRE	14.6.79	4.12.79,	
SALOP	14.6.79	6.11.79.	
G. LONDON (except Enfield)	14.6.79		
DERBYSHIRE	28.6.79		
KENT	28.6.79		
STAFFORDSHIRE	6.9.79		
SURREY	22.11.79		

Counties in which all Orders have been signed.

CUMBRIA	NORFOLK
DURHAM	NORTH YORKSHIRE
HAMPSHIRE & ISLE OF WIGHT	WARWICKSHIRE
HUMBERSIDE	WILTSHIRE
LINCOLNSHIRE	

① Eno/Bundy Commission
Assemblies
? Justice Encl. Act.
July 15th into extra Deputy Chairman
... post July Conference 83. at least
- that timetable.
assuming completion Spring 82.

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O.C.D.M.
30.11.79