

Robin Butler

MEETINGS WITH DEPARTMENTAL MINISTERS

Thank you for letting me have a sight of your note to the Prime Minister of 3rd August, and her comments on it.

I remain convinced that the suggestions you originally made in your note are both important and valuable and I note that the Prime Minister does not in principle dissent from what you have proposed.

Since the Prime Minister wishes to resume occasional meetings with groups of Junior Ministers at her room in the House of Commons, perhaps we could discuss the practical arrangements for this; by implication they will take place when Parliament is sitting, ~~so~~ we have time to arrange a reasonably balanced forward programme of such meetings.

So far as meetings with her Cabinet colleagues are concerned, the Prime Minister's wish is clearly that such meetings could and should be arranged but on a fairly informal and flexible basis. Looking at the schedule of Cabinet colleagues and dates which you set out in your original memorandum, it seems to me reasonable that we should start with the Home Secretary on 24th October. If you agree to this, perhaps we could have a word as to how this first meeting should be set up and how we proceed thereafter.

MA

PRIME MINISTER

Meetings with departmental Ministers

During a diary meeting today, Michael Alison pointed out that, while you have

- (a) weekly meetings with the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary;
- (b) weekly meetings with senior members of the Cabinet and the Chief Whip, and Monday lunches to which other members of the Cabinet come in rotation;
- (c) slots on Tuesdays and Thursdays for meeting backbench members;

our present arrangements do not cover junior members of the Government or enable you to discuss in any depth the day-to-day problems facing particular Departments other than the Treasury and the FCO.

We discussed this problem and felt that it would be worth suggesting to you that we should try to fit into the diary an hour between 6 and 7 each week during which you could invite in turn the Cabinet Minister in charge of each Department to bring along his junior Ministers for a drink and a talk about their current preoccupations. There would be a minimum of formality and we should need to make clear that these were not decision-making sessions, and still less occasions for departmental Ministers to lobby you about some dispute they were having, e.g. with the Treasury. They would be opportunities to tell you what was going on. Apart from yourself, only Michael Alison and I (or one of the other Private Secretaries) would be present.

Looking at the diary, we find that with Party Conference, CHOGM etc., we cannot quite manage one a week, but it looks as if we should be able to fit in dates as follows between now and Christmas.

/ 24 October

24 October	Home Secretary and his Ministers
31 October	Secretary of State for Education and his Ministers
10 November	Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his Ministers
17 November	Secretary of State for Energy and his Ministers
15 December	Secretary of State for Defence and his Ministers
21 December	Secretary of State for Scotland and his Ministers

Would you like to experiment with a series of meetings on these lines? If so, are these the Departments to start with?

F.R.B.

At the Whip dinner, I understood that the Junior Ministers in groups prefer to come to my room in the House for a drink where we can discuss things. We did that during the Falklands period. I suggest we take it up again now.

3 August 1983

I don't think we can get the timetable to so many dates as above for departmental work. We will fit in each department as we can  
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