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*Copied to
Walter set
Home Affairs*

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Home Secretary called on the Prime Minister at 1100 hours to discuss the London Magistrates' Clerks' strike.

Mr. Whitelaw said that he was very anxious about the prospect that the strike would continue. Although it was alleged that the Government would be able to "sweat it out", he doubted whether it would be possible to win this particular dispute. There were only some 700 people involved in the strike, and the union were only too willing to continue paying strike money. Justice was no longer being done in the Courts: for example, Magistrates were only inflicting fines which they thought offenders could pay up immediately, for without the Clerks there was no way of pursuing them for later payments. He was worried that some of the lay Magistrates would soon refuse to sit. There was a real risk, in his view, that a "bad case" would soon hit the Press, and this would backfire on the Government. The Prime Minister interjected that, on the contrary, it would backfire on the union: if news stories started to appear that standards of justice were deteriorating, the Government could castigate the union for it.

Turning to the pay proposal which the Clerks had rejected, Mr. Whitelaw said that he thought the sticking point with them was his totally non-committal statement on the results of the Working Party. He thought they might accept the November staging, but they would insist on a more forthcoming statement in respect of the Working Party's conclusions. He thought it might be right to modify his position so as to say that following the Working Party's report, the Clerks would not be worse off than Clerks outside London. This would at least give them confidence that the Working Party's conclusions would not be wholly overturned by the Government.

There was also the question of the final staging. If the Inner London Clerks were to be treated like the industrial civil servants, then the final staging should be in April. But if they were to be treated no worse than the Outer London Clerks, there would need to be back-dating of the Working Party's findings to December. One might possibly agree to this on condition that next year the Inner London Clerks returned to the same negotiating procedure as the Clerks outside London.

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/The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister commented that it would have been far better if the Inner London Clerks had agreed to be referred to Clegg. If Mr. Whitelaw were to modify his position in the way he had suggested, he would also have to insist at the end of the day that London Clerks should be paid no more than the amounts recommended by Clegg for those outside London.

No decisions were taken, and it was left that there should be a further discussion next Wednesday when the Lord President will be available.

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cc: M.J. Vile, Esq.,
Cabinet Office.

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