

BACKGROUND NOTE

Unemployment

The church leaders are likely to ask questions about unemployment, and the press reports of more than two million unemployed in 1981.

Child Benefit

In a letter to the Times on 13 February, the Social Responsibility Departments of all the churches expressed concern "about the growing evidence of the community's failure to provide adequate support for those most economically vulnerable, and especially children". They were worried by "the report that child benefits will not be increased this April, and possibly not in November 1980" and urged a review "of the whole confused and inadequate structure of allowances, subsidies and taxes as they affect families with children".

You may wish to say that you are aware of this concern over child benefit rates, but the Chancellor's Budget cannot be anticipated. The DHSS, the Treasury and the Inland Revenue work closely together on questions of cash benefit and taxation, and it seems highly doubtful whether a major new Beveridge-style review is required.

Education

The Churches have a most important role, for example in teacher training (Westhill and the Methodist Colleges) and in the education based Youth Service. The Government wants to increase parental involvement in the running of schools, witness the parent governor provisions in the new Education Bill. The Churches can do a great deal to encourage good racial understanding, and to support voluntary effort by local communities to raise the quality of life in inner city areas.

/The Voluntary Sector

The Voluntary Sector

The Manifesto said:-

"In the community, we must do more to help people to help themselves, and families to look after their own. We must also encourage the voluntary movement and self-help groups working in partnership with the statutory services."

The Government does not encourage voluntary provision wherever possible just because of the need to reduce public expenditure, but because it is inherently better for the community itself to provide care for its most vulnerable members. The Churches have a long tradition of social welfare activity which is much longer than the State's, and the Churches contain many of the most caring and altruistic people in society. It is good that the British Council of Churches has contacts at a high level with the DHSS. And the Home Office's Voluntary Services Unit is providing financial help to efforts by the Churches to promote community work.

The Family

Placed firmly at the centre of this Government's domestic policies. The Churches and the Government share a commitment to uphold standards, and the Churches do have opportunities through their pastoral work to help people avoid some of the personal distress and social problems which flow from family and marriage breakdowns. The Government has invited comments on the report "Marriage Matters", published last year as a consultative document.

Fringe Religious Groups

Government Departments receive inquiries and appeals for help from parents anxious about the involvement of their children in one of the fringe cults, and church leaders must come to know many such distressing cases in the course of their work.

Abortion Legislation

There are many sincerely-held divergent views, and this was why the Government took no collective view on the Corrie Bill and allowed a free vote.

Value Added Tax and the Churches

This is a concern which they should pursue with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

PRIME MINISTER

Dinner with Sir Cyril Black and the
Free Church Leaders

Sir Cyril Black has invited 19 Free Church Leaders to his dinner for you at the Savoy on February 27. A list is attached, as is Sir Cyril's original invitation. Those who attended your party here last November for Archbishop and Mrs Coggan, some of whom were also in the British Council of Churches deputation which you received here last October, are marked with an asterisk.

You have also received the Reverend William Gowland, this year's President of the Methodist Conference, and you sent him your comments last month on a Methodist memorandum about the problems of London. Mr Gowland replied very appreciatively.

You have agreed to make a short speech, and to answer questions. A draft speaking note is attached, based on your St Lawrence Jewry address of March 1978.

It is difficult to know what questions may be raised; Departments have provided material, and notes are attached.

A number of those who will be present are involved with the British Council of Churches, whose deputation you saw last year. The BCC, which is affiliated to the World Council of Churches, includes all the Churches except the Roman Catholics. Its debates last autumn on nuclear weapons and on South Africa attracted attention.

The Censure Debate now limits to about 1½ hours the time you will be able to spend at this dinner.

22 February 1980

CVP

cc Mr. Gow
Mr. Peterson

W/c Box

PRIME MINISTER

Dinner to meet Free Church Leaders: 27 February

I am attaching a letter from Sir Cyril Black and would be grateful if you could agree the following:

(a) Are you happy with the amount of information that has been given on the people who are attending? *ms*

(b) Would you be happy to make a short speech followed by questions? Colin Peterson has got you plenty of background information. *ms*

(c) It is customary for no alcoholic drinks to be served at a Free Church gathering and I hope you will be happy with this arrangement!

ms

ms

of course.

6 February 1980