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TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE

I enclose two papers for discussion at the Steering Committee meeting on Monday, 3rd April, at 5.00 p.m. in the Leader of the Opposition's Office:

- (1) A revised version of 'Conservative Policy on Education and the Arts' by Mr. St. John Stevas.
- (2) A paper on public expenditure on education by Mr. Lawson.

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CFP/MMM  
23.3.78

LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE55TH MEETING

Minutes of the 55th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.  
on Monday, 13th March, 1978, in the Leader's  
Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,  
Lord Thorneycroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe,  
Mr. Pym, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Maude

Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Butler,  
Mr. Patten, Mr. Nicholson,  
Miss Passmore

Apologies: Lord Carrington, Sir Ian Cilmour,  
Mr. Prior, Mr. Davies

Conservative Policy on Education and the Arts, LSC (78) 66

Mr. St. John Stevas introduced his paper indicating that all the proposals in it had been approved by the Backbench Committee on Education. It was noted that these proposals were not costed, but that Sir Geoffrey Howe and the Research Department were working on this aspect.

There was a general discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) It was desirable to recast the introduction to underline the crisis in our educational system, indicate our main objectives, and point out the need for full co-operation and participation of teachers, parents and local education authorities. We should seek to mobilise popular feeling.

(ii) There should be more emphasis on education providing the means to earn a living, and on the importance of links with industry. It was noted that there were two study groups operating: one on links between education and industry, especially the engineering industry, and a second on vocational education.

(iii) More reference might be made to the independent sector, in particular the Government's threat to private schools through the withdrawal of the "recognised as efficient" classification.

(iv) The paper should refer to the problem of rural schools and point out the social disadvantage of closing large numbers of these. It was thought that if a school had more than 35 pupils there would be a case for keeping it open, especially as there was very little saving from closures because of the cost of the extra school transport and because teachers were usually redeployed to other schools.

(v) We should investigate whether the reports of the Schools' Inspectorate were effectively followed up and, if necessary, provide for a more efficient checking system.

(vi) It was desirable to reintroduce "visible bench marks and hurdles" viz. the testing of abilities through examinations and the publication of results on a school by school basis. It was desirable to take the opportunity provided by the falling numbers in schools over the next few years to improve this testing process. This would have two useful results: parents would be given objective evidence to assist them in choosing between schools, and the children themselves, whether able or less able, would be given additional motivation. It was appropriate for schools to issue prospectuses indicating performance in examinations and tests.

(vii) We should examine the possibility of giving any child who had spent eleven years at school the opportunity of leaving before the age of 16, as there was evidence that children were inclined to learn more in their earlier years than later on.

It was agreed that there would be a further meeting on Monday, 3rd April, to discuss the specific proposals in the paper and in particular costings. Dr. Rhodes Boyson and Dr. Keith Hampson would be invited to attend.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.

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