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10 DOWNING STREET

5 June, 1985.

*From the Private Secretary*

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Drugs Misuse

The Prime Minister yesterday held a meeting with the Lord President of the Council, Home Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Secretary of State for Education and Science, Chief Secretary, Minister of State (Treasury), Minister for Health, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. John Patten, Mr. John McKay and Mr. Wyn Roberts. Mr. Hartley Booth and Mr. Chris Brearley were also present.

The Prime Minister opened the meeting by stressing the priority which now needed to be attached to tackling the problem of drug misuse. The meeting gave an opportunity to consider the proposals now under discussion within the working group chaired by David Mellor.

On developing proposals to permit the forfeiture of assets of convicted drug traffickers, the Home Secretary reported that good progress was being made with the preparation of legislation. It might be possible to include the necessary provisions in the legislation now being drawn up for this session to control the sale and possession of alcohol at football matches in England and Wales. The Home Secretary would explore with the Opposition whether this would be acceptable to them. If legislation on forfeiture could not be introduced this session, other vehicles would need to be considered for the following session.

The Home Secretary, referring to the note he had circulated for the meeting, said that the work of the Mellor group had shown that Departments were approaching the problem vigorously, and were not being hide-bound about Departmental divisions. The expenditure which might be involved in implementing the proposals in the annexes to his note might amount to some £15 million. On those proposals covering his own area of responsibility he indicated that a priority was to ensure full cooperation between police and Customs. This had not in the past always matched the need for all concerned to work together to fight the scourge of drug abuse. The police and Customs had now agreed that a

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joint steering committee, under Home Office chairmanship, should be set up. This represented a big advance.

The Home Secretary believed that an extra 240 officers in the Regional Crime Squads (RCS) would be an effective way of improving the investigation of drugs-related crime. He was anxious that as far as possible these extra posts should be found from within existing resources. But his powers were limited. Even if the police were persuaded, the local authorities, particularly those faced with abolition, could frustrate this kind of redeployment. Some extra resources would probably be required. It was agreed that the local authorities' position strengthened the case for this, but it was important to ensure that as much pressure as possible was brought to bear on the authorities concerned, and on the police, to encourage them to devote to drugs the resources which the problem demanded. The strengthening of the Central Drugs Intelligence Unit would be valuable in backing up the expansion of the RCS.

Mr. Hayhoe reported that much had been learned from the experience of posting a senior Customs officer to Karachi. Customs wished to extend the arrangement to other countries, including those in Latin America, the Caribbean, Cyprus and India. It was also intended to develop home-based teams to detect heroin and cocaine. The agreed aim was to bring in 50 extra officers over the remainder of the year. This would build on the 100 extra posts announced by Mr. Clarke at last year's Party Conference. The 50 posts had been agreed and were being funded from within existing cash resources this year. For the future, the Prime Minister said that the deployment of staff within the resources of Customs and Excise as a whole should reflect the heightened priority to be accorded to tackling drugs misuse.

The Foreign Secretary said that the international dimension of the drugs problem required close Foreign Office involvement in the discussions on drugs, and he noted the need to establish the scale of resources required. He was particularly concerned about drug traffic through, and originating within, the Caribbean. Our Posts in those countries, as elsewhere throughout the world, were well aware of the importance they needed to attach to drugs intelligence. Officials were working on arrangements in the British Dependencies in the Caribbean to overcome the banking secrecy which helped drugs dealers to launder their returns.

The Prime Minister stressed the importance of drugs work being high on the list of priorities within the Diplomatic Service. Crop substitution was an area which needed careful attention. She also noted that military aircraft might be used to furnish reconnaissance reports, e.g., in Belize. She was concerned that the armed services should be aware of the importance of tackling the problem, and should help where they could. The MOD should be involved in discussions within the working group. Mr. Mellor said that he would pursue this.

Mr. Clarke said that even the soundest experts could not all agree on the best method of treatment for drug misusers, but the experts within DHSS were now having an impact on changing attitudes outside so that the medical profession was taking the problem of drugs abuse more seriously. The health authorities, in particular, were giving it more priority, though the position here was still patchy. DHSS were looking carefully at the plans the health authorities were submitting on developing their work on drugs. A summary of the information they provided would be published shortly. Ministers could use this to encourage the least cooperative authorities to catch up with the rest. DHSS already made substantial sums available in the field of rehabilitation, mostly to voluntary bodies. They were proposing to allocate an extra £5 million in each of the next three years.

The Prime Minister noted her concern about the increasing abuse of tranquillisers. Mr. Clarke said he thought the introduction of the selected list should be a real help in discouraging GPs from over-prescription. The publicity campaign currently under way had heroin as its major focus. Future campaigns could direct attention onto other drugs too.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science said that special grants of £2 million a year for the next two years were being made available to enable local education authorities to appoint people to coordinate action aimed at the prevention of drugs misuse. This was being achieved within existing resources. The Prime Minister stressed the need to ensure that proper training was given to those individuals. Sir Keith and Mr. Patten should consider this together.

Concluding the discussion, the Prime Minister noted that it had been agreed that tackling the problem of drug abuse should have a heightened priority within all the Departments concerned as far as possible within existing resources. Much was already being done through the working group, which would be reporting to H Committee in July, and through the initiatives already being taken by Departments. It was highly desirable that the legislation on forfeiture should be put in place as soon as possible. The public would not understand if the Government failed to accord the drugs problem the importance it deserved.

I am sending copies of this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Elizabeth Hodgkinson (Department of Education and Science), Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), John Graham (Scottish Office), Colin Williams (Welsh Office), Steve Godber (DHSS), Alison Smith (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Richard Broadbent (Chief Secretary's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), Mike Norgrove (Minister of State, Treasury), Sarah Bateman (Minister of State, DHSS), Jane McKessack (Mr. Patten's Office, DHSS), Ken Sutton (Mr. Mellor's Office, Home Office), Miss Teale (Mr. MacKay's Office, Scottish Office), Mr. Morris (Mr.

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Roberts' Office, Welsh Office), and to Richard Hatfield and  
Chris Brearley (Cabinet Office).

*Yev*

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