

SUBJECT

cc ~~Master~~
Parliament

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

House of Lords Reform

There was time at this morning's regular Monday meeting with the Home Secretary, the Chairman of the Conservative Party and the Chief Whip for only a brief discussion of House of Lords reform.

The Prime Minister said that she had had it in mind for some time now to set up a Ministerial group to look at the options for House of Lords reform. But it was important that any such group had a balanced membership, and she thought that for that purpose it would be useful to have one or two Ministers like Mr. Younger and Mr. Fowler on the group. The Lord Chancellor had now written to her, however, saying that he, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Lord President had been discussing the matter and wanted to put a paper straight to Cabinet, with the Ministerial group being established only after Cabinet had provided a clear steer.

On the substance of the issue, she regarded the House of Lords as a unique body which worked by tradition and custom. It had served the country very well, and we should think very carefully before changing it. If there was to be reform, there would have to be an elective element; but that would affect the powers of the House of Commons, and faced with this possibility, the Commons would draw back. Lord Home's group had studied all the options when the Conservative Party had been in Opposition, but they had been unable to reach a unanimous conclusion on which course to go for.

Lord Thorneycroft said that there were two separate questions. The first was whether the House of Lords should be entrenched in some way. The second was whether to undertake reform of the House of Lords. It would be perfectly possible to do something about entrenchment in this Parliament, but reform was something which could not be tackled before the next Parliament. He believed that opinion outside Parliament was moving in the direction of reform,

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though views inside Parliament still seemed to be against any fundamental change. The Home Secretary added that what was certain was that opinion covered a very wide spectrum in almost every forum, including the Conservative Party.

The Prime Minister said that she would be grateful if those ^{could} present/consider the matter further. They would discuss it again at their meeting the following week.

fw.

3 November 1980