

MR BUTLEREDUCATION DISCUSSION: CHEQUERS, SUNDAY 13 MARCH 1983

|                 |                  |               |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| <u>Present:</u> | Prime Minister   | Mr Parkinson  |
|                 | Baroness Cox     | Mr Waldegrave |
|                 | Sir Keith Joseph | Mr Mount      |
|                 | Mr Biffen        |               |

1. Student Loans

A revised approach to the original paper was discussed. Mr Biffen felt that the first aim must be to keep the question alive in a way which could carry us through the General Election, and this would only be politically possible on the lines now suggested by Mr Waldegrave - namely, that only the parental contribution should be considered relevant to the loan scheme. Sir Keith pointed out that parents who wished to continue to pay the parental contribution could, of course, do so; but that the essential point was that less well-off students would not be discouraged from seeking access to higher education. The disadvantage was, of course, that we were substituting an initial and sizeable Exchequer contribution for the parental contribution, and that in the short-term this would add to public expenditure. It was pointed out that the banks now offered considerable overdraft facilities to students who were in financial embarrassment, and it was worth discussion with them how far a loan scheme could be carried out through their agency. However, it was agreed that, subject to consultations with the Treasury, this was the best route for keeping the principle alive. (Sir Keith's letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 16 March gives effect to the conclusions in this discussion.)

2. Polytechnics

Lady Cox said that the situation in the North London Polytechnic was just as bad as it had been when she had written "The Rape of Reason". The case of Marian Jeffrey which she had drawn to the attention of the Prime Minister and Sir Keith was only the symptom of a Marxist saturation of the Sociology Department. North London was not the only Polytechnic where this kind of process had taken place. It was usually confined to the Sociology and allied departments, and did not generally infect other faculties such as Law and Engineering.

The difficulty was that the Sociology section of the CNAA was itself under Marxist domination and was therefore validating courses which ought not to be validated. Sir Keith and Mr Waldegrave suggested that the inspectors were the people to pick up this kind of corrosion of academic standards, but it was admitted that the difficulty was to find impartial sociologists of sufficient weight and courage to carry out investigations of this sort, and report without fear or favour. However, they were very conscious of the difficulties and would certainly see what the DES could do to help.

### 3. Education Vouchers

There was a brief discussion of progress on education vouchers and Sir Keith said that his group was working on proposals which would be brought back to Ministers as soon as they were ready.

F.M.