

Tim

The PM quoted from
para 2 of his background
note when answering
the question about the
CPRS report.

Can you pl make
sure her words are
not in quotation
marks in Hansard
(otherwise we will have to
publish the report).

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Ref. A083/1906

MR RICKETT

Charlotte
This arrived at 1630 today!

Prime Minister's Question Time: Reference to CPRS Report on Merseyside in Environment Committee's Report

Wh 30/6

The Third Report of the Environment Committee's evaluation of the Merseyside Initiative refers to an early 1981 CPRS report on Merseyside which allegedly predicted the Toxteth riots. This is not accurate.

2. I attach some notes for supplementaries to take if the subject is raised at Question Time. In view of The Times article today it is likely to be.

3. I also attach a background note.

Lindsay Wilkinson

LINDSAY WILKINSON

30 June 1983

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Prime Minister's Question Time: Reference to CPRS report in Environment Committee's latest evaluation of Merseyside Initiative

Reference: Extract from the Third Report of the Environment Committee relating to the Merseyside Initiative (Attached).

Notes for Supplementaries

Did the CPRS report predict the Toxteth disorders?

No. It was not an assessment of what might - or might not - happen in the immediate future; it was concerned with the longer term with emphasis on the economic problems and their possible solutions.

What did the CPRS report recommend and will the Government publish it?


The advice of the CPRS, like other official advice to Ministers is normally treated as confidential. We do not intend to publish this Report.

Why was the CPRS report prepared?

The Government had been concerned for some time about our inner cities. Merseyside was a cause for particular anxiety and the Government had already taken several special initiatives to help the area, such as the urban development corporation. It asked the CPRS to look at the problems and longer term prospects and needs in the light of the various efforts and initiatives.

What happened to the CPRS report?

Consideration was inevitably overtaken by subsequent disturbances in Toxteth. But the special mission of enquiry in Liverpool by my Rt. hon. Friend, the then Secretary of State for the Environment and the subsequent Merseyside Initiative, which drew on the CPRS work, show how seriously the Government views the problems of Merseyside and similar areas.



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Report allegedly was critical of Government policies at the time

The main aim of the report was to look at the area's long-term problems and not at existing policies.

Why was the Environment Committee unable to obtain a copy of the CPRS report?

It is well established that advice by officials to Ministers on policy issues is not made available to the House itself or to Select Committees, whether in confidence or otherwise, save in the most exceptional circumstances (extract from Prime Minister's letter of 14 December 1981 to Chairman of Transport Committee who had asked for a copy of CPRS Report on Railway Electrification).

Background Note: CPRS MERSEYSIDE REPORT, JUNE 1981

1. The CPRS report in question is presumably that of June 1981 entitled "Merseyside - a Regional Policy Case Study". This was prepared at the request of an ad hoc group of Ministers, which met under the Prime Minister's chairmanship on 30 March. The report looked at possible measures for tackling the problems of Merseyside and pointed to some wider conclusions for regional policy. The line agreed for use by the No. 10 Press Office at the time was to acknowledge the existence of the report and to stress that it was looking mainly at longer term problems and solutions.

2. The report did not predict the Toxteth riots. However, it took the view that if high unemployment persisted and if the entire region became one of concentrated disadvantage, the existing support services and income redistribution mechanisms would be inadequate to prevent social unrest. To try to avert this, the report recommended -

- more emphasis on local industry and small firms;
- promotion of service industries including financial and leisure services and tourism;
- more use of the port;
- more training for skills.

3. Consideration of this report was overtaken by the Toxteth riots, Mr Heseltine's visit to Liverpool and his subsequent report and the Merseyside Initiative. Some of the CPRS ideas were incorporated in the Initiative.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE MERSEYSIDE INITIATIVE

102. To attempt an evaluation of the Merseyside Initiative is difficult. First, it is too soon for measurable improvements to the Merseyside economy to show themselves. Secondly, it is very difficult to show that particular developments occurred because of the initiative, and would not have occurred in its absence. Thirdly as the Merseyside Task Force is not an executive agency, its achievements are only discernible in the actions of other bodies: there is understandable competition to claim the credit for progress. Fourthly, it is difficult to disentangle the Secretary of State's influence in respect of his Merseyside responsibility from that which he exercises in the normal pursuit of his duties. Finally, it is further complicated by confusion as to the objectives of the exercise, which have been variously stated in both grandiose and modest terms.

103. The Committee accordingly approached this Enquiry with four questions in mind concerning the Merseyside Initiative. First, was it necessary? Secondly, what has it achieved? Thirdly, in what form, if any, might it be continued on Merseyside? Fourthly, what lessons, if any, may be drawn for the management of urban renewal in the other conurbations?

WAS THE MERSEYSIDE INITIATIVE NECESSARY?

104. It is clear that the problems of the management of urban renewal take a particularly severe form on Merseyside. A plethora of agencies with different boundaries, powers, statuses and accountabilities seek contrasting objectives on various spatial scales. Relations between some at least of these bodies serve to make coherent urban governance impossible. High levels of economic distress and social discontent have long been apparent on Merseyside. Disorders of the summer of 1981 we believe were both predictable and predicted.¹ And the Secretary of State's own independent review team concluded that Partnership no longer had a reality in Liverpool. Some kind of initiative was clearly necessary.

105. However, much of the evidence submitted to the Committee shows widespread confusion as to what the new initiative was intended to achieve. The Secretary of State was, after all, still chairman of the Partnership Committee. The implication—that more should have been done to revive and develop the Liverpool Partnership—is inescapable. In the light of the evidence before them, the Committee concludes that steps could and should have been taken to arrest the decline of the Partnership arrangements, to encourage the establishment of topic-based working groups and to address the issues of urban deprivation. The Committee considers that the intentions of the Partnership have been virtually abandoned. It believes that the present pretence of continuing the Partnership should cease. Partnership should be made a reality and developed as an effective co-ordinating mechanism as originally envisaged. In the Committee's view, a renewed initiative to re-establish the Liverpool Partnership could have been taken in 1981 and should now be attempted quickly.

106. Nevertheless, if such a step had been taken in 1981, it could hardly have met the needs of the wider situation. The problems of Merseyside extend beyond the inner city. The Committee consider that some kind of broader initiative was indeed necessary. The spatial scale of that initiative had to be sufficient to

¹The Committee understands that a report was prepared by the Central Policy Review Staff (Think Tank) early in 1981, that predicted the disorders. The Committee has been unable to obtain a copy of this report.

encompass all the significant agencies and programmes. The area of operation of the Merseyside Task Force is in the Committee's view the right area within which to tackle the problems of urban renewal there.

107. The Committee concludes, therefore, that the timing of the initiative as an apparent response to the riots was unfortunate. The case for a new initiative had been made some time before, and the Committee believes that the Government could and should have acted earlier. In the scale of its operations the Merseyside Task Force was both necessary and appropriate. Whether it was the right approach must be judged in the light of its achievements.

WHAT DID THE INITIATIVE ACHIEVE?

108. The question of the Merseyside initiative's achievement cannot be answered to the satisfaction of all the parties involved. Some witnesses were sceptical of its value; some were enthusiastic and others were dismissive. Some managed to be both enthusiastic and dismissive within the span of a single memorandum of evidence; others changed their view under questioning.¹ The Government's own stated objectives are relevant here. The Secretary of State's announced role was to "bring together and concentrate the activities of central Government Departments and work with local government and the private sector to find ways of strengthening the economy and improving the environment of Merseyside".² The Task Force would assist by proposing changes in policies and resources, generating new initiatives, and examining proposals for reducing unemployment and improving the economic and social life of the conurbation.³

109. The Committee's starting point is that it is useful to distinguish the benefits of having a part-time 'Minister for Merseyside' from the benefits of the Merseyside Task Force itself. Each may be considered in turn.

110. In considering the Secretary of State's own actions on Merseyside it is important to keep the time-scale clearly in view. Some of the most important developments there predate his assumption of responsibility in October 1981 and the setting up of the Task Force. The Merseyside Development Corporation was already started. He had already acted to break the Cathedral precinct deadlock. The Community Refurbishment Programme which the Committee visited in Sefton and Wirral originated in earlier DOE initiatives. The refurbishment of Princes Boulevard and the International Garden Festival arose from earlier ministerial decisions.

111. The most significant feature of the present initiative is the important change in the relationship between central and local government because of the close attentions of a Cabinet minister. The Secretary of State told the Committee that "Central Government is having to rething its approach to the distancing that has taken place",⁴ and that his Department "would be very happy to intensify the relationship" with other urban authorities.⁵ Under the new initiative, "the presence of a senior minister close to the ground can give a degree of immediacy which is very substantial benefit and value".⁶

¹HC18-iii, Q. 212 and 242.

²HC18-i, page 33, Annex F.

³*ibid.*

⁴HC18-iv, Q. 322.

⁵*ibid.*, Q. 377.

⁶*ibid.*, Q. 359.

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of urban renewal take a number of agencies with different contrasting objectives on Merseyside. Some of these bodies serve to alleviate some of economic distress and disorder on Merseyside. Disorders of the kind predicted.¹ And the Committee concluded that Partnership no longer was clearly necessary.

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in 1981, it could hardly have been extended beyond Merseyside. A broader initiative was needed and had to be sufficient to

Central Policy Review Staff (Think Tank) has been unable to obtain a copy of