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Prime Minister 16/5 2

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16 May 1984

PRIME MINISTER

EDUCATION IN LIVERPOOL

Keith is still understating the appalling educational consequences of accepting Liverpool's proposals. His main argument in favour of acceptance is that this will improve the provision of 'O' and A' level courses. It is difficult to see how.

At present, there are six popular county schools in Liverpool with total sizes between 1,000 and 1,500 pupils: three of these have sixth forms of more than 150 pupils. In the less popular schools, sixth forms are small and diminishing. If nothing is done, the sixth-formers will congregate in the viable and popular schools; and this will be no bad thing. But under the plans, every school will be given a roughly equal size sixth form - about 100 pupils each. The council admit that these new sixth forms will not be viable on their own: co-operative arrangements will be necessary. How, then, can Keith use the present difficulty of co-operation as a reason for accepting the proposals?

The more one inspects the Liverpool plans, the worse they look. As you will see from the annex, most of the popular schools are to receive a double blow. For example, the popular Quarry Bank is to be merged with Aigburth Vale, also popular, to form a joint school of 2,100 pupils with a large sixth form: this monster is then to be reduced over five years to a mere 1,000 pupils with only 100 sixth formers. In other words, these two popular schools will be first disrupted by amalgamation, and then arbitrarily halved in size and deprived of a viable sixth form; and many parents' choices will be overridden. Meanwhile, Speke - a school that spells horror to Liverpoolians - is to be amalgamated with the relatively popular Hillfoot Hey to make what will doubtless prove a disastrous combination, with an undersized sixth form. And to add insult to injury, the ghastly Netherley will have its rolls arbitrarily increased - though its sixth form will still be too small to offer the much-prized range of 'A' levels.

In educational terms, the proper course of action would be to reject these proposals forthwith. As David Barclay points out, the Government could consistently explain that its commitment to reduce the level of spending remains undiminished, but that the necessary economies can and must be achieved in ways more acceptable to parents and pupils.

However, a rejection at this stage will be portrayed as another frontal assault on local democracy, particularly

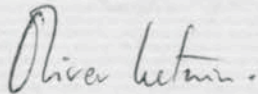
SECRET

damaging after the Labour Group has been strengthened in the main election. Fortunately, the rejection does not have to be announced at once. Indeed, it would be advantageous to delay any announcement for a month or two.

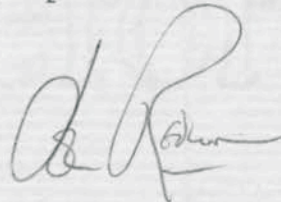
By the end of June, the council may have set some sort of rate. If the rate is legal, we shall be out of the present political impasse and will be able to reject the scheme. If, however, the rate is illegal and Commissioners are sent in, we can put the question of education into their hands. We must find one or two Commissioners who are sound, and who could be given the explicit task of producing a decent schools plan that pays more respect to parental preferences. No doubt this would cause additional difficulties for the Commission; but - as Michael Heseltine suggested at the last meeting - these difficulties should not prove insuperable.

Liverpool Council could apply for a writ of Mandamus to force a decision. But it is not certain whether they would do so, how long it would take, or whether they would succeed. And the Government could, of course, announce a decision at any point in the process, to limit this embarrassment.

We suggest that you should urge Keith to delay any announcement until the question of Commissioners is settled, and to make an interim statement setting out the reasons for his reluctance to approve the proposals.



OLIVER LETWIN



JOHN REDWOOD

LIVERPOOL: EFFECTS OF THE COUNCIL'S PROPOSALS

School	Popularity	Fate	I Present no of pupils			II No of pupils after reorganisation			III No of pupils in 1990		
			11-16	16+	Total	11-16	16+	Total	11-16	16+	Total
1. Quarry Bank	Pop	] amalgamated	1200	200	1400	] 1800	300	2100	] 900	100	1000
2. Aigburth Vale	Pop		600	100	700							700
3. Anfield	Pop	] amalgamated	1000	100	1100	] 2000	200	2200	] 900	100	1000
4. Stanley Park	Quite Unpop		1000	100	1100							1100
5. Breckfield	Unpop	] amalgamated	800	50	850	] 1450	100	1550	] 900	100	1000
6. Collegiate	Unpop		650	50	700						
7. Hillfoot Hey	Fairly Pop] amalgamated	550	70	620] 1050	75	1125] 900	100	1000
8. Speke	V. Unpop		500	3	505							505
9. Boys Institute	Pop	Closed (Boys to 10 & 11)	500	50	550						
10. Girls Institute	Pop	] amalgamated	300	30	330	] 1050	100	1150	] 900	100	1000
11. Paddington	V. Unpop		250	15	265							265
12. Childwell Valley	Unpop	] amalgamated	600	50	650	] 1500	150	1650	] 900	100	1000
13. Holt	Fairly Pop		900	100	1000							1000
14. Carr Lane	Unpop	] amalgamated	700	50	750	] 1700	150	1850	] 900	100	1000
15. Queen Mary	Pop		1000	100	1100							1100
16. Alsop	Middling	No change	1000	50	1050			Same as Col I	900	100	1000
17. Fazackerley	Unpop	No change	700	50	750			Same as Col I	900	100	1000
18. Highfield	Unpop	No change	1175	75	1250			Same as Col I	900	100	1000
19. Netherley	V. Unpop	No change	600	50	650			Same as Col I	900	100	1000
20. New Heys	Middling	No change	1350	100	1450			Same as Col I	900	100	1000
21. Shorefield	Unpop	No change	900	50	950			Same as Col I	900	100	1000

22. Yew Tree	Unpop	No change	540	8	550	Same as Col I	900	100	1000		
23. Gatacre	V. Pop	No change	1500	150	1650	Same as Col I	900	100	1000		
24. Holly Lodge *	V. Pop	No change	1200	150	1350	Same as Col I	900	100	1000		
25. West Derby *	Pop	No change	1200	100	1300	Same as Col I	900	100	1000		
TOTALS			21,000	2,000	23,000	21,000	2,000	23,000	15,300	1,700	17,000

*
Saved by modifications.

N.B. ALL FIGURES ARE ROUNDED APPROXIMATIONS

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PRIME MINISTER

EDUCATION IN LIVERPOOL

I attach a minute from the Education Secretary reporting his conclusions following your meeting about secondary education in Liverpool.

Sir Keith still favours approval of the City Council's plan, with modifications to preserve some single sex provision. But on reflection he proposes the retention of a different pair of schools - Holly Lodge Girls and West Derby Boys. These are among the best schools in the City, and Sir Keith believes that their retention would go a modest way further to meet parental aspirations.

This is not a very substantial movement from Sir Keith's original position. The main alternative remains a response to the City Council which makes clear the Secretary of State's reservations about their scheme's unpopularity with parents, and invites them to submit fresh proposals. Sir Keith is probably right when he says that this amounts to a rejection of the current plans. It would delay economies, and the necessary reduction of surplus capacity. But I do wonder whether it would really be as difficult to present as Sir Keith fears: the Government could reasonably say that its commitment to reduce the level of spending remains undiminished but that it believes the necessary economies can be achieved in more acceptable ways.

If you judge that a further meeting is necessary it will have to be this week. Agree we set this up?

DUB

Yes not

David Barclay
15 May 1984