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SUBJECT
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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 March, 1985

Shop Hours

Sir Terence Conran came to see the Prime Minister yesterday to discuss shop hours. He was accompanied by Mr. Nigel Whitaker of Woolworth PLC and the Open Shop Campaign. The Prime Minister said she hoped shop hours would be de-regulated but there would be a strong alliance in the Commons against it of USDAW, the Lord's Day Observance Society, and small shopkeepers. It was important to sell the idea on the grounds that it would create new jobs.

Mr. Whitaker said de-regulated shop hours in Scotland had not caused a major upheaval. It had created new jobs for his organisation and had not created difficulties for married women with families. Open Shop believed that only 25 per cent of shops would open compared with the IFS estimate presented to the Auld Committee of 48 per cent.

Sir Terence Conran said the change was needed to reflect new patterns of work. In the 1950s few married women worked. Now a great many did, but shops were open only when they were at work. He preferred to think in terms of de-regulating shop hours rather than simply in terms of Sunday opening. The objective was to allow shops to provide a better service to customers. He was confident that more jobs would be created and it would not result simply in six days' trade being spread over seven. There would be additional receipts from tourists and de-regulation would encourage entrepreneurship. The change would also allow retailing to increase its share of the total value of consumer expenditure. Mr. Whitaker said the change would accelerate the trend towards part-time working. This would further weaken USDAW, which represented only a sixth of shop workers.

The Prime Minister said the Auld Report was likely to be debated some time after Easter. The Open Shop Campaign could help by mobilising backbench opinion. They would need to counter the various negative arguments as well as

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pressing strongly the advantages. It would be helpful if pressure were not to come solely from the large retailers.

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