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PRIME MINISTER

AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION

You have a meeting on Monday with the Foreign Secretary and the Lord Chancellor to discuss Australia's request to have one of the originals of its Constitution.

The arguments for are that this is a matter of great pride to the Australians, particularly in this bicentenary year. If you were able to announce a gift of one of the copies of the Act during your visit (or even hand it over), it would add enormously to the impact. Since we have two copies, it can be argued that it would be selfish not to let them have one - indeed apply the same principle to any Commonwealth country which seeks a copy of its Constitution. After all, nothing is more precious and fundamental (imagine how we would feel if some one else had the original of the Magna Carta). The Australians have made clear that they are not interested in a facsimile copy.

The arguments against are principally that we have a continuous archive of such documents and should not allow it to be depleted. If we respond to Australia's request, we shall be confronted with many similar demands from other Commonwealth countries, not only for copies of their Constitutions but other documents and archives, such as the India office library. Can we draw a line at handing over copies of the Constitutions only? Parliament would probably have to be consulted and the issue might well be controversial there.

Further background is in the papers in the folder.

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(C. D. POWELL)

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