



FROM: CHIEF SECRETARY  
DATE: 14 March 1988

PRIME MINISTER

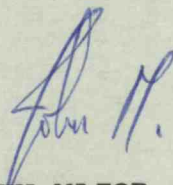
**THYSSEN COLLECTION**

I have seen the correspondence between your office and Richard Luce's about the possibility that the Thyssen collection might be permanently located in this country.

2 Obviously there are very great attractions in the idea that we should secure such a major collection. But it is now becoming apparent that the cost may be very high, and high enough to make us think very seriously about the implications before entering into any commitment. I understand that a very preliminary estimate of some £200 million has been made, representing mainly the cost of the paintings which Baron Thyssen would want us to pay for, and partly the cost of a suitable building. But that figure could obviously prove to be an underestimate. We appear to be in competition with the Getty Museum among others; and it would not be surprising if the building turned out to cost a lot more than the £35 million which has been mentioned. We could well be contemplating another arts project on the scale of the British Library, which is costing well over £300 million.

3 We must also bear in mind that readiness to incur expenditure on this kind of scale could well strengthen pressures for greater public munificence in other areas. We will therefore need to consider Baron Thyssen's proposal very carefully once the detail of it is fully clear. It may be that any preference which he may have for the UK might be reflected in more favourable terms, possibly within range of what might be met from private sources. But if not, we are clearly being invited to enter into a very large spending commitment.

4 I am copying this minute to Richard Luce and to Sir Robin Butler.

  
JOHN MAJOR

PRIME MINISTER

The Chief Secretary will stay on tomorrow  
afternoon after the Social Security meeting  
to discuss the Thyssen Collection

PAB

P. A. BEARPARK

25 April 1988