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PRIME MINISTER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES

I have seen your Private Secretary's letter of 21 November conveying your reaction to my minute to you of 14 November about the presentation of our local government policies.

I am grateful for your agreement that we should devote extra effort and resources to explaining and propounding the Government's case on local government. And I take entirely your points on the need to observe all the proprieties in such an exercise; there was never any intention that established procedures and rules governing the conduct of departments and officials should be by-passed or waived in this exercise. I am, however, concerned that strict adherence to the other points in your Private Secretary's letter could hamper our efforts to counter the major campaign being waged against our policies, to which local government is devoting substantial quantities of staff and resources. (The GLC is reported to have allocated 83 millions to their campaign!). There are two points in particular I would like to mention.

This is agreed

First, I think it is essential to establish a small team of civil servants dedicated full-time to the task of explaining and co-ordinating the presentation of our local government policies - policies which range across a number of divisions whose staff are already hard pressed in developing the policy and preparing legislation. The issues with which they will be dealing are sufficiently complex to demand that the people concerned are themselves steeped in the arguments and capable of producing the material required with the minimum disruption of the efforts of the local government policy divisions.

While the team would exist specifically for this purpose and would be separate from the individual policy divisions

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X | concerned, it would nevertheless be part of the local government command in my Department, which is headed at Deputy Secretary level. It is not my intention to recruit outsiders to serve full-time in the team, but there will be occasions when we need to call on the skills of one or two experienced journalists, for example in the preparation of material for the popular press. I would, however, propose to do this through the conventional channels of my information directorate and COI as appropriate.

Second, on the preparation of material for MPs and Peers, I entirely agree that officials must not be exposed to allegations of partiality. It has however always been my understanding that civil servants can be used to prepare and distribute factual and explanatory material on the policies of the Government of the day as a basis for briefing MPs, Peers and others on an all party basis. Where we wish to prepare factual briefing designed specifically for our own party I would of course arrange for it to be distributed by Central Office; any political gloss or interpretation would be for Ministers or Central Office to add.

These arrangements would, I hope meet both your concerns and my desire to present our case to best effect. Our supporters in the House are looking to me for a much higher profile in countering the opposition from the GLC and the Metropolitan Counties.

Subject to the assurances I have given, I would therefore be grateful for your agreement to my setting up a team along the lines I have proposed.

/ I am copying this to John Wakeham (who is expressing anxieties

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that we must put much more effort into getting our policies across, both inside and outside Parliament) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

PJ

P J

28 November 1983

Local Govt Bel Pt 18



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

1 December 1983

Dear John.

Local Government Policies

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 28 November. It is agreed that your Department should establish a small team of civil servants dedicated full-time to the task of explaining and co-ordinating the presentation of the Government's policies on local government. The Prime Minister takes the view, however, that the Department should not employ outside journalists on a paid basis. She feels that the talents and resources to write the necessary pieces should be available from the Information Officers of the Department or from COI.

I am copying this letter to Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Andrew Turnbull

Andrew Turnbull

John Ballard, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

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Hll

MR TURNBULL

D/ENVIRONMENT UNIT

You sought my advice on Patrick Jenkin's latest letter.

I view with considerable suspicion the idea of calling on the skills of one or two experienced journalists in the preparation of material for the popular press. These journalists would not do the work for nothing and their engagement through either D/Environment or the COI is not the point: the offence is to spend public money as hiring private help.

I believe that notwithstanding the earlier terms of the letter Mr Jenkin has not substantially, if at all, modified his ideas.

I believe he must be told firmly that there can be no question of hiring outside help, whether through his Department or COI, at public expense.

I should add that the need for "outside" journalists is probably overrated; these skills exist in Government. Unfortunately, in my experience, something which is paid for from outside is usually valued more than that which is provided "free" internally, regardless of quality.

On Mr Jenkin's second point, we need to be careful about distribution. Civil Servants can certainly prepare factual, explanatory material on Government policy and they can issue it to media and public. But it is for the Minister responsible to distribute it to his own Backbenchers or to Members of Parliament generally by placing copies eg. in the Library. The Minister's PPS can be particularly helpful here.

So far as briefing designed for the party is concerned, it is perfectly respectable for the Department to supply factual, informative material via the Minister to CCO. But it is for CCO to present or gloss it in party terms and to distribute it to the party.

[Handwritten signature]

B. INGHAM
30 November 1983

*Andrew - we can't have
journalists for this job.
Information Officers are
supposed to be able to write
Some of them have been
journalists. What puzzles
me is why the Inf. Office in
D/Env can't cope.*

*Minister's PPS have
to put across the
party's side. and*

*Special
adviser
mb*



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister ①

To see Bernard's advice
Agree I write saying
outside journalists should
not be used on a paid
basis? Yes

Agree I make points on
distribution?

On leak, my letter went to
secretaries of Cabinet colleagues
(incoming minute was so
copied and principles were of
general applicability). Within
DoE about 5 people received
copies from Secretary of State's
office. - 2 junior ministers,
permanent secretary, head of
local govt division, and
head of information. But
it might have been recopied.

It is too wide a
circulation

AT 30/11

cc. POST OFFICE, Future Part 7
LOCAL GOVT., Relations Pt. 18 file

da



bc: CO

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 November 1983

In Mr Box

Sale of BT Shares

I will be showing your Minister's letter to John Gummer of 25 November to the Prime Minister on her return. Most of the action proposed is clearly on the Party network. You might, however, be interested to see the proposals which the Secretary of State for the Environment made recently for an information unit to get across the Government's view on local authority issues. As you will see from her response, as recorded in my letter to John Ballard, the Prime Minister is anxious that the dividing line between Party and Government and between information and propaganda should be very carefully observed.

Andrew Turnbull

Neil McMillan, Esq.,
Department of Trade and Industry.

RM

PRIME MINISTER

cc Mr Ingham
Mr Mount

Attached are Mr. Jenkin's proposals on the Information Unit and comments from Mr. Ingham and Sir Robert Armstrong. There is agreement on the need to improve the presentation of the Government's case on local authority legislation (Policy Unit also endorse this).

Mr. Ingham accepts a separately identifiable unit provided:-

- i) It does not have outsiders in it;
- ii) Does not feed direct to the Party (MPs, peers and local authority leaders);
- iii) It is supervised by the Policy Group on which the Chairman of the Party sits, thereby providing the link with the Party.

Sir Robert's approach is still more cautious. He recommends:-

- i) No outsiders;
- ii) No separately identifiable unit;
- iii) A small number of officials devoted to improving the flow of information, but working within the Government machinery.

DOE have already allocated three officials to this. The question is whether going further significantly improves the presentation of the Government's case in relation to the risks of encountering criticism that the dividing line between information and propaganda has been crossed.

/The judgement

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The judgement is for you. My inclination would be to follow Sir Robert's line. Bernard would be content with this.

Agree Sir Robert's approach?

AT

ANDREW TURNBULL

18 November 1983

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I totally agree with Sir Robert.
The required task of constantly putting
out the facts is for D.O.F., under its
normal rules. We cannot use for
money for Party political purposes. For
Parliamentary purposes - yes.
No

✓ NO
BI

Ref. A083/3291

MR BUTLER

with AT

The Secretary of State for the Environment minuted the Prime Minister on 14 November about his proposal to set up a small unit to co-ordinate a campaign to improve general understanding of the Government's policies towards local government. If the task of the unit is confined to clear factual explanation of Government policies, and is not one of actively persuading the public to support the policies concerned, this is a perfectly proper and defensible use of public funds. It is obviously right that the Government should seek to inform the public and Parliament about its policies and to counter misinformation. But I do wonder whether, given certain recent events and the nature of the local Government lobby, it would be wise formally to identify a unit for this purpose.

2. I can see the value of using information experts to help put the Government's message across. I can also see that those officials directly involved in developing the policies do not always have the time nor the necessary objectivity to consider their presentation. But a separately identifiable unit - particularly one which is known to include public relations people - will almost certainly attract criticism of the kind Dr Owen recently directed at the Government's use of the information service - and that some people directed at the unit which the Secretary of State for Defence set up to explain the Government's nuclear policies (and which was soon disbanded). The dividing line between information and propaganda can be identified and defended, but the critics have by far the easier task. And I do wonder whether the unit will be able to produce enough hard factual information on a consistent and continuing basis to justify its information role.

3. The judgment is a political one, but I fear that it would be hard for the Secretary of State to prevent people seeing his unit as a propaganda machine. In that case a better answer might be



to put more effort and resources into explaining Government policies but not to give anyone the opportunity to criticise - however unjustifiably - by labelling them as a separate information unit.

Re

Approved by
ROBERT ARMSTRONG
and signed in his absence

18 November 1983

conqueror

MR TURNBULL

D/ENVIRONMENT - INFORMATION UNIT

The Prime Minister will need to be absolutely sure how public money is being spent on this campaign.

You will recall the row, which rumbled on for months, over the reported proposal by Ministry of Defence to spend an alleged £1m or so on paid publicity in support of the multilateralist case. This idea was not proceeded with.

Mr Jenkin's minute does not explain how public money is to be spent. But his reference to the possibility of drawing in people from journalism and public relations suggests that he is actually proposing to hire at public expense a public relations firm. If this is so then I think we are in for deep and counter-productive trouble.

It is one thing to acquire free journalistic and public relations advice on a voluntary basis; it is entirely another to hire it.

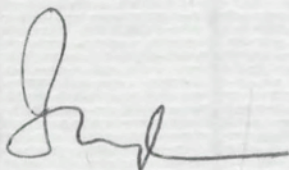
My strong advice is that the unit should be confined to the Civil Service, serving Ministers.

This leads me on to my second point: the row will be compounded if the unit directly serves Conservative MPs, peers and local authority leaders. The MOD unit avoided this pitfall by effective co-ordination with the Party through the Party.

Mr Jenkin's proposal lacks the policy/supervisory dimension of Mr Heseltine's efforts at MOD. There Mr Heseltine brought together the responsible Ministers of affected Departments, including for example Scottish Office, the chairman of the Conservative Party, Mr Heseltine's PPS and senior officials from affected Departments as well as myself. This served as an ideas body which took decisions through the S/S for Defence and his fellow Ministers and subsequently carried out in their respective capacities by the MOD Unit, other Departments and Tory Central Office.

In short, I believe Mr Jenkin's proposal lacks:

- (i) the crucial top level steering group that served the MOD exercise so well; and
- (ii) clarity over how public money is to be spent, bringing the possibility at least of a major row.



B. INGHAM

17 November 1983

15 November 1983
Policy Unit

PRIME MINISTER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES: INFORMATION UNIT

We are still not getting our case across on rate limitation and abolition of the GLC and the Metropolitan Counties. This is because the debate is still dominated by the vested interests of councillors and officials, but I am sure that there is a large reservoir of untouched sympathy among the general public for what we are doing, and I am sure that Patrick is right to set up a temporary small unit à la Heseltine to put the case across. This is amply justified, since there are so many complex issues to be explained, and so many different local authority services to be reassigned.

We therefore suggest that you agree that Patrick should set up his unit as soon as possible.

FERDINAND MOUNT

fm

K/NO



PRIME MINISTER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES: INFORMATION UNIT

You know that a concerted campaign is being waged against our local government policies, particularly rate limitation and abolition of the GLC and Metropolitan Counties, by the local government establishment and a number of individual authorities.

Much of the propaganda put out by the local government lobby is disingenuous if not deliberately misleading. But it is receiving a lot of attention from the media and is in danger of gaining unjustifiable credence.

I therefore think we have to take positive and specific steps to explain and propound the case for our policies - policies which I believe should command widespread support from our supporters and from the public at large. Time is now pressing, however, with the introduction of the Rate Limitation Bill and the annual Rate Support Grant settlement only a few weeks away.

I therefore propose to set up a temporary small unit (along the lines of that set up in the Ministry of Defence recently) to tackle the problem. It would consist of some five or six people. They would be a mixed team of administrators: information officers and possibly people drawn from the journalism and the public relations world outside. Their task would be to co-ordinate and promote a campaign to improve general understanding of our policies and to counter the propaganda of the local government lobby. Their attention would be focussed not only on the media but also - through Ministers of course - on Conservative Members of Parliament, Peers and local authority leaders.

No

This must be done through the Party.

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Yes

We might face criticism for arguing our case through a campaign in the media at cost to public funds, rather than through Parliament which has yet to take a decision on the policies. My answer to this is that I have a duty, as the responsible Minister, not to allow the kind of misrepresentation of our policies which is taking place to go unanswered. The time has not yet come in the Parliamentary timetable when the specific arguments can be dealt with across the floor of the two Houses. And there are obvious limits to the extent to which Ministerial speeches outside Parliament can deal adequately with the campaign that is being waged.

This is done through DOE rather than the other side of the fence

In these circumstances, I am advised that it would be perfectly proper for me to allocate Departmental resources now to ensure that the Government's proposals are fully understood in the country at large, provided of course that these resources are devoted to supporting Ministers in the exposition of their policies and not for the provision of "Party political" material. I have consulted Sir George Moseley on this and he is content.

Subject to your agreement, I hope the new Unit can start to operate within days.

I am copying this to all members of the Cabinet, to John Wakeham and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

for

P J

14 November 1983

(Dictated by Secretary of State and signed in his absence)

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