

PRIME MINISTER

We have not yet resolved the problem of postal charges for the blind. Here is a letter from Mr. Butler's office suggesting four alternatives.

The first option is to persuade the Post Office to maintain the status quo, quietly. This is unlikely to work for several reasons, but particularly because Mr. Mills - who runs this little charity - is likely to press for a formal statement of the position, thus raising the issue for other charities;

Secondly, DHSS "at official level" have said that they would not be prepared to provide any financial support to replace the extra Post Office concession;

Thirdly, a private benefactor might be found, but when David Wolfson and I looked into this, we concluded that Mr. Mills was not likely to be satisfied with discreet support from charitable sources. He seems determined to go for publicity;

The fourth option would be to encourage the Post Office to retain the basic concession on reading needs, whilst allowing them to withdraw extension to cover entertainment material like music.

The fourth option would not meet your concern: there would be bad publicity over a question of current expenditure of about £5,000. This really only leaves the option of your directing Mr. Jenkin to find this sum. His original doubts are set out in the letter at Flag A.

Do you want me to go back to Mr. Jenkin's office saying that you do now wish him to find the money?

27 August 1980

MJP
Will the P.O. continue
the concession until we
find a private benefactor.
There is no objection to substituting
David Jenkin's benefaction for public.
David Jenkin's Trust I have in mind now

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From the
Minister of State's Private Secretary

M Pattison Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

22 August 1980

Dear Mike,

POSTAL CHARGES FOR THE BLIND

Your letter of 10 July asked for a report of developments since my letter of 9 July in which I said officials were looking at various possible ways of financing postal charges for National Music for the Blind.

Officials here have been pursuing the question with the DHSS and, at this stage, there would appear to be four alternatives.

Firstly, as you suggested in your letter of 30 June, we could ask the Post Office to continue to allow National Music for the Blind to abuse the basic concession. The Post Office would probably not be prepared to maintain the status quo; they might be in breach of the Post Office Act if they discriminated in this manner. If the concession were extended to similar organisations, the cost to the Post Office would be £1½ million to £2 million per annum. We share the Post Office's doubts that the concession could be restricted to National Music for the Blind, and we have no powers to require them to provide such a concession. Furthermore, Mr Mills could well bring matters to a head by pressing for a formal extension of the concession to cover entertainment material.

The Post Office could not be expected to increase its subsidy to the Blind beyond the £5.6 million cost of the basic concession. They rightly point out that support for the disabled is the responsibility of Government. However, DHSS,

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with whom this responsibility lies, have at official level stated that they would not be prepared to provide any support for this concession.

Thirdly, a private benefactor might be persuaded to provide the £5,000 or so per annum needed to finance National Music for the Blind's postal charges. I wrote to you on 25 June about the suitability of this organisation to receive such assistance.

The fourth option of allowing the Post Office to withdraw the entertainment concession whilst retaining the basic concession remains.

The Post Office is prepared to continue to finance the concession to National Music for the Blind whilst it awaits a response from Government.

However, they believe that they must make a statement about the future of the concession to National Music for the Blind, since the existence of the review is known to Mr Mills and others. In making public their decision to withdraw the concession on entertainment material, the Post Office will make it clear that the Government had not been prepared to provide support.

The alternatives are therefore, either to allow the additional concession to be withdrawn and accept that there could be some unfavourable comment concerning the attitude of both the Post Office and the Government, or to provide financial support along the lines described above.

I am copying this letter to Don Brereton (DHSS), Richard Prescott (Paymaster General's Office) and David Wright.

*Yours sincerely,
Jonathan Hudson*

J C HUDSON

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