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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 February 1980

The Prime Minister has seen the Secretary of State for the Environment's minute of 11 February, about local government elections. She has also seen the Paymaster General's minute of 12 February.

She intends to mention the subject at Cabinet as soon as a suitable opportunity arises.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Prescott in the Paymaster General's Office.

M. A. PATTISON

David Edmonds, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

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PRIME MINISTER

I have discussed with Peter Thorneycroft the forthcoming local government elections on 1st May. Our colleagues in local government will be fighting seats in 36 Metropolitan Districts, and 103 non-Metropolitan Districts in England; and in 53 Scottish Districts.

The elections will not be easy and we must expect to lose seats generally and control of certain authorities specifically.

In order that we can do all we can to help local government may I ask that so far as is practicably possible we refrain from unpopular government announcements during the month of April. On the positive side, we should try to concentrate any popular announcements within our gift in the two weeks beginning 14 April.

Perhaps it would be possible for either the Paymaster General or myself to coordinate an exercise along these lines.

At this stage I am copying this only to Angus Maude and Peter Thorneycroft, but if you agree we should of course need to bring in all our Cabinet colleagues.

MS

MH

11 February 1980

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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

12 February 1980

PRIME MINISTER

I have seen Michael Heseltine's minute to you of 11 February about the forthcoming local government elections. I shall be happy to co-operate with him.

His proposal is obviously sensible. Your Press Secretary and I are already embarking on an exercise designed to get the Departments to be more forthcoming in the promulgation of 'good news'. We shall do everything possible to concentrate it, where possible, into the last two weeks of April.

On the avoidance of 'bad news', my experience is that Departments always have the most pressing reasons why their worst announcements have to be made at the most inconvenient times. I should welcome some pressure from you on this.

Finally, I must add that the effects of public spending cuts will still be in people's minds, and that perhaps the most influential local election factor will be the Budget. These require major presentation planning, of course; but the Chancellor is in a sense the arbiter of our success.

I am copying this to Michael Heseltine and Peter Thorneycroft.

AM