

PRIME MINISTER

You asked us to look again at the possibility of retaining a postal concession for "National Music for the Blind". As I told you, both Adam Butler and Patrick Jenkin felt it wrong in principle to maintain this concession when it was clear that analogous groups could not expect similar treatment. I had a word with David Wolfson about the possibility of finding a private benefactor, and he confirmed that this would be possible provided that the organisation was sufficiently reputable and discreet. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. The attached letter from Mr. Butler's office shows that the man who runs National Music for the Blind is not prepared to accept with discretion help offered to him. The Post Office had made it clear that they might be prepared to continue the postal concession on a one-off basis, if Mr. Mills would keep quiet about it, but he refused to do so.

In view of this further information about the way in which Mr. Mills operates, I think we have little option but to accept Mr. Butler's advice that we should allow the Post Office to withdraw the concession and that we should not seek to substitute a Government subsidy, or private support secured through your good offices. There is no prospect of achieving a discreet one-off arrangement, and we could not publicly defend formal special arrangements for this charity without extending them very much wider.

Agree?

26 June 1980

*Somehow the concession
must be retained. The
putting job retaining it will
be as nothing compared with
rejecting it. not*

RESTRICTED

✓ ce D. Wolfson



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From the
Minister of State 's Office

The Hon Adam Butler MP

M Pattison Esq
Private Secretary to
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

25 June 1980

Dear Mile,

NATIONAL MUSIC FOR THE BLIND

You asked whether National Music for the Blind (NMB) would be a suitable organisation to receive assistance from a charitable source.

The DHSS has consulted both its Regional Social Work Service and, on a confidential basis, a major voluntary organisation for the blind.

Mr Derek Mills, the Director/Founder of NMB is a former British Rail ticket collector who retired early on health grounds and who during his retirement has founded and operated a range of organisations broadly based on the use of tape recorders and cassettes, of which NMB is one. Each organisation is small, and much of the burden of administration, accounting, scripting, actual taping and appeals for funds fall on Mr Mills himself. The concept is of a simulated radio station, "Radio Churchtown", featuring nostalgic music for the blind, disabled, and elderly lonely people.

The scale of the undertaking is small but rapidly expanding. Mr Mills claims to send out 1,980 packages a month with an estimated audience of 3,800. Total expenditure increased from £1,900 in 1977 to £10,000 in 1979. The accounts, however, appear to be kept in somewhat haphazard fashion, with no sharp distinction being drawn between the various organisations, although Mr Mills seems to put a lot of his own money into their organisation, and no one doubts that he is very hard working and that his heart is in the right place. A charitable donor would, however, find it difficult to ensure that the only beneficiaries were blind people.

/ ... Because NMB



Because NMB is virtually a one man activity, there have been doubts in several of the organisations it has approached for funding about the standards of administration and accounting. For example, Sefton Borough Council, the Local Authority, felt obliged to refuse a grant as whilst they thought highly of the organisation they had doubts about the standards of administration and accounting.

There might also be some doubt, on past precedent, about Mr Mills' discretion; the Post Office offered to turn a blind eye to the fact that he was receiving free postage if he kept quiet, but he refused to do so.

In sum, although Mr Mills appears to be a worthy person, it would be difficult to recommend the giving of assistance in view of the doubts which have been expressed about the organisation of the accounts, and of the difficulty of ensuring any assistance only benefited the blind.

I am copying this letter to Don Brereton (DHSS) who may wish to comment on his Department's position, and to John Wiggins (H M Treasury), David Wright (Cabinet Office) and Richard Prescott (Paymaster General's Office).

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Hudson

Jonathan Hudson
Private Secretary