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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
and  
Paymaster General

*Prime Minister*

14 September 1981

[E Fran]

*Dear Margaret,*

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I shall not be able to attend next Wednesday's meeting of E Committee which is to discuss papers by the Secretary of State for the Environment for interim and longer-term measures on rates, but I think that I should draw attention to the Parliamentary implications of attempting to accelerate the timetable for next Session's Local Government Finance Bill in the way discussed in the Secretary of State's minute of 8 September.

I am doubtful whether the timetable set out in the annex to the Secretary of State's minute could in any circumstances be regarded as a reasonable one for a Bill of this kind. There is obviously no prospect of agreeing a voluntary timetable for the Bill, and I would certainly not want to contemplate a guillotine motion until there was some evidence of deliberate obstruction in Committee. On the Secretary of State's own timetable, this would probably not emerge until well into January (even if the House comes back after the Christmas recess on 11 rather than 18 January), and it would then be almost impossible to carry a timetable motion, complete the Commons stage, take the Bill through the Lords, and deal with Commons consideration of Lords amendments by the proposed deadline of 5 February. We could, of course, deal with the Bill as an emergency measure, with all stages taken on the Floor of the House, but I could not convince myself that this was a sensible way of dealing with a Bill of this importance, and it would inevitably mean that one or more of our other main programme had to be dropped or severely delayed. Quite apart from the constraints imposed by the Parliamentary timetable, I understand that Parliamentary Counsel does not have the resources to draft the Bill and assist in its passage to the suggested time scale without putting aside the drafting of other programme bills.

.../...

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

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I fully appreciate the importance of giving rate payers some protection from the worst excesses of the overspending authorities at the earliest possible opportunity, but I hope that colleagues will accept my judgement that the timetable now put forward by the Secretary of State for the Environment is simply not a realistic one.

I am copying this to Cabinet colleagues, to the Chief Whip, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Francis Pym*  
*Francis*

FRANCIS PYM

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