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10 March 1982.

M MacLean, Esq.,
Private Secretary to the Chief Whip,
12 Downing Street.

Dear Murdo

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE: 10 MARCH
PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS: 12 MARCH

1. The only items of business for Legislation Committee on 10 March were two debates on European Community documents, on which I am writing separately, and the handling of Private Members' Motions for 12 March. The Lord President of the Council thought it would be appropriate to settle these matters in correspondence, and the meeting of Legislation Committee was therefore cancelled. This letter sets out the background to the Motions for 12 March and proposes how they might be dealt with.

Young People - Mr Frank Dobson (Labour, Holborn and St Pancras South).

2. The full text of Mr Dobson's Motion is not yet available, but it is likely that he will comment adversely on the current provision of educational opportunities for young people, and the impact of the recession on employment prospects, and make demands for increased resources. So far as education is concerned, extra resources have been made available for courses in schools and colleges for the age group in question, where extra numbers of pupils are staying on. New kinds of courses, and new curricula for the less able, have been announced. The Manpower Services Commission has also announced recent initiatives in this area. On the employment side, the debate would provide an opportunity for the Government to explain the measures being taken under the recently announced Youth Training Scheme, and the Young Workers' Scheme which is currently being built up. Ministers may agree that the best course is for the motion to be talked out, but that the Government should be prepared to defeat it if necessary.

VAT and Historic Buildings - Mr Jim Callaghan (Labour, Middleton and Prestwich).

3. A campaign has been running for some time to exempt from Value Added Tax the cost of repairs and maintenance of historic and listed buildings. The Government has resisted this campaign on the grounds that the case has not been adequately made out. VAT is a broadly based tax, and exemptions are rare. It is open to the owner of a historic or listed building to sell it if costs become too high, or to apply for grants to assist with maintenance. Ministers may agree that, if the motion is reached, it should be talked out, but as it is unacceptable arrangements might need to be made for it to be defeated.

Retirement Pensioners - Mr Tristan Garel-Jones (Conservative, Watford).

4. Mr Garel-Jones may be anxious about the extent to which retirement pensioners may need to fall back on capital to meet rising costs. A wide range of specific issues could be raised, including abolition of the earnings rule, the extension of help with fuel costs to a wider range than those on supplementary benefit, the 'capital cut-off' for supplementary benefit, help with transport, etc. In the course of a debate on the elderly on 4 February the Secretary of State for Social Services announced a range of new measures of assistance. There will be an occasion for a further debate in the course of the Budget debates. The motion is unlikely to be reached, but Ministers might conclude that if it were it should be talked out.

5. In conclusion, Ministers may agree that -

- i. Mr Dobson's Motion should preferably be talked out, but defeated if necessary.
- ii. Mr Callaghan's Motion should, if reached, likewise be talked out or defeated if necessary.
- iii. Mr Garel-Jones' Motion would not be reached.

6. I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Members of Legislation Committee and the Private Secretaries to the Secretaries of State for Education and Science, Defence, the Environment, Social Services and Employment. I should be grateful if any comments on this letter could be sent to me by 3 pm on Thursday 11 March.

Yours

David Hilary

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