



CC NO
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01-212 3434

NBPM

Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP
Secretary of State for the Environment
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 3EB

12 January 1984

Dear Patrick

MALPRACTICES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

I read your letter to the Prime Minister about malpractices in local government with great interest. I wholeheartedly welcome your intention to press forward with investigating and assembling more information.

My strong feeling is that whatever we plan to do to tackle the problem, where there is already hard evidence of malpractice we should not remain mute, but should give the facts full publicity. The time has surely come to expose and attack those Labour Councils who are pursuing the policy you describe. This will help justify our local government policies and will lay the basis in public opinion for a formal investigation if it should prove desirable.

I am copying this letter to recipients of yours.

Tennant

Nicholas Ridley

NICHOLAS RIDLEY

Local Govt. Relations Pt 18

13 JAN 1988

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DSG

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cc: Cabinet
M/State, J/M
(Mr. Gummer)
C.O.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

21 December 1983

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's letter of 20 December about the collection of material on malpractices in local government.

BT

The Prime Minister is content with what is being done and notes that, when the current part of the exercise has produced results, your Secretary of State will consult colleagues on how best to carry the work forward. She also looks forward to seeing the factual speaking note which your Secretary of State is producing.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to those who received your Secretary of State's letter.

E. E. R. BUTLER

John Ballard, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

DSG



Prime Minister

I think that this is intended to withdraw what the Cabinet interpreted as critical remarks about Sir G. Moseley:

would you like me to invite Sir R. Armstrong to comment? And are you content with what is being done?

2 MARSHAM STREET
LONDON SW1P 3EB
01-212 3434

My ref:

Your ref:

20 December 1983

Dear Margaret,

20.12

Yes

In your summing-up at Cabinet on 8 December (CC(83)36, item 5), you asked for a note on any problems that had arisen in arranging for material about malpractices in local government to be got together.

Like Michael Heseltine and Tom King before me, I have become aware of highly questionable activities taking place in a few local authorities. These are concentrated in urban areas, especially London. My Department has been assembling material over the past two years on the subject (though there has not hitherto been available such blatant public flouting of democratic principles as the recent events in Brent!) In general, the evidence has been of majority groups forcing through decisions by ruthless use of the party caucus (sometimes with co-opted non-councillors) and by manipulation of standing orders. Hitherto neutral officers are being subjected to political pressure in their daily work. Appointments of officers are turning on candidates' known political sympathies. Councillors can work virtually full-time on Council work through exploiting the allowance system and/or finding tailor-made "employment" ie a job with a salary but with no work, in sympathetic neighbouring authorities. Discretionary powers are being used to grant-aid eccentric or politically-motivated organisations. Public money is being used to finance blatantly propagandist newspapers. While such abuses seem to be within the letter of the law, they break both its spirit and the conventions which have traditionally existed within local government.

In putting forward this material to Ministers officials drew attention to the implications not only for local government but also for the reputation and integrity of the public service at large.

I discussed the position at a meeting with George Younger and Wyn Roberts in October and we concluded that the anecdotal material so far assembled was not yet sufficiently robust for me to seek colleagues' consent to a formal inquiry, or for the case for such an inquiry to be defended in

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Parliament. Further and more comprehensive first hand evidence was needed. By its very nature, this might well not be elicited by direct Departmental approaches to local authorities, especially to those most under suspicion. The very erosion of political independence among certain Chief Executives and senior officers which is suspected means not only that their cooperation could not be relied upon but that obstruction would be only too likely.

The most promising approach to gathering reliable first hand evidence of the extent and depth of the problem seemed to me to lie in sounding out Conservative minority groups, and other informal sources, in selected areas. This would entail seeking information systematically, and - necessarily - covertly, from minority groups about their authorities' procedures and decisions. Such an approach would in itself be a departure from past practice, reflecting the unfortunately changed circumstances in which we now have to work.

The decision to entrust this task to the party network was based partly on the judgement that such an approach might well yield better information than would be divulged in response to letters from Departmental officials; and partly because it avoided any question as to whether civil servants could properly be used for this particular method of collecting evidence for the exercise. Our current problem is not therefore rooted in any stiff-necked intransigence on the part of Departmental officials. Rather, it lies in the fact that we were faced with the need to collect information direct from political sources and using party channels seemed the preferable course.

Once the current part of the exercise has yielded results, I shall want to consult colleagues on how best to carry the work forward, whether by monitoring identified abuses in specific areas, by launching a more formal investigation, by stimulating a public debate or by the setting up of an independent inquiry.

I shall be circulating separately a factual speaking note for use by colleagues.

I am copying this letter to Cabinet colleagues, John Gummer and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*You are
Pat*

PATRICK JENKIN

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP

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