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3 October 1984

PRIME MINISTER

A VOICE FOR LONDON

There will be a concerted effort to create a Voice for London as part of the campaign against the Met abolition proposals.

The dangers for us lie not only in the traditional Opposition, but in the success they are likely to have at Conference and beyond in attaching Conservatives to their cause. Some of the current Conservative GLC councillors, looking forward to the oblivion that comes from loss of office, will be very sympathetic. Some London MPs will join the bandwagon (eg Philip Goodhart). Patrick and Ken will probably argue we need a fallback position.

None of the local government options being canvassed - a small elected Authority, a chain-gang of Borough Mayors, an expanded Joint Board which takes care of general issues - is desirable. All of these call into question the very point of abolition, provide a launch-pad for further expenditure and lobbying, and give the Opposition a signal victory.

The only conceivable solution which meets the requirements to incur no extra expenditure, to have some elected Authority, and to be to a greater extent under Government

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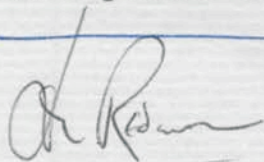
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control, would be the Grand Committee of the House. Even this admits weaknesses in the Met abolition strategy, and invites the question "why not Grand Committees for other parts of the country as well?"

The right approach for Patrick and Ken to follow is to go out and win the argument. If we really believe that local government is best made accountable at the local level, and that the borough is the sensible unit of local government, we should say so loud and clear. There are no large trans-borough issues which need a separate voice: strategic planning has always been a Socialist nightmare.

The meeting could be used as an opportunity to explore with Patrick and Ken the timetable for finalising the structure of London government; for explaining it to the people; and for exploring again the lack of progress in coming up with savings. By concentrating attention on Voice for London, the Government runs the danger of fighting on ground chosen by its opponents. The vital thing is to stake out some ground of its own and go and occupy it immediately.

If, after trying to win, Ken finds it is now too late to hold the desired line over Voice for London, the least unacceptable fallback position is the Grand Committee.



JOHN REDWOOD

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

Prime Minister

Mr Jenkin and Mr Baker wish to have an informal discussion about the "London Dimension". It is not a subject about which they talk freely in the Department. Not have they written anything down.

I do not know whether they want to discuss how to defeat the arguments for a London dimension, or what tactical retreat could be made if the pressure is too great. I hope the former.

AT  
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