

SECTION ON " INNER CITIES"

When we came to office in 1979, our first priority was to reduce inflation and to re-establish the process of creating real wealth. This we have done.

It now becomes possible, indeed urgent, to bring new life to those areas for which the term "inner cities" has become a convenient shorthand.

But our concern is wider than that. It is for all the areas where the process of recovery has yet to bite, whether they be outer housing estates, rural communities, or the run-down areas close to the heart of some of our great cities. Their need is very real.

The problem is not new. Inner city poverty has been with us for a very long time. Indeed, it occupied the attention of several of my Victorian predecessors. It would be quite wrong, therefore, to imagine that these long-standing, deep-rooted and inter-related problems are susceptible to swift and easy answers. To give any other impression would be to play a confidence trick on those who live and work in these places.

Just as we refused to cheat in restoring stability and value to our currency, so we reject short-term measures and superficial solutions.

Real and permanent change will only spring from the ingenuity, dedication and entrepreneurial skills of those who live there.

What the Government can do is to work with the private sector and local communities, and with the vast majority of local authorities who are prepared to co-operate with us and genuinely have the well-being of their people at heart.

We have already begun this process through our Inner City Task Forces and I am greatly impressed with the way in which many private sector companies are beginning to see that their leadership, commitment and resources really can open up the prospect of lasting change.

There are three clear first impressions which have struck me on recent visits to the inner city areas. The first is the inter-relationship of the problem.

For example, you can't expect to attract our brightest young teachers, however dedicated, to our most needy Education Authorities unless you can provide them with somewhere to live in the community they have decided to serve.

The central issues of education, social provision, jobs and housing are of course linked. One hears of young teachers in London's East End having to choose between sleeping on a friend's floor in term time or commuting to work from Peterborough or Twickenham.

Secondly, the post-war solution of housing large numbers of families in ugly and decaying tower blocks is just not acceptable to a modern and prospering society.

I believe that a concerted effort, involving the private sector and in particular "Business in the Community", an organisation of some 270 of our largest companies, (under the active presidency of the Prince of Wales,) could replace or transform them. It is already well under way and deserves every support and encouragement.

Thirdly, I have been greatly encouraged by the enterprise of new and small scale businesses.

I was especially pleased to discover that so many of those either training for self-employment or already established in small businesses are from the minority communities. This development should encourage us all.

We need to tackle these issues with urgency if our prosperity is to be enjoyed by those who have borne the brunt of change. ✓

I believe that this can be done, but let me repeat that government cannot and must not tackle this on its own.

Lasting change will only come about through a concerted approach led by the private sector, in partnership with those who live in these areas of considerable difficulty and great opportunity.