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TO:

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister

FROM:

KENNETH CLARKE

Contact, subject to any
comments from Robin Butler?

31 March 1988

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ACTION FOR CITIES

1 I am keen to maintain the momentum of the successful Action for Cities launch on 7 March. Departments are already carrying forward their new initiatives. In order to maximise the impact it is my view that we need to co-ordinate all new inner city announcements and that we should concentrate on a small number of priority areas.

2 In due course we will want to be able to demonstrate that our policies have had a significant impact on specific locations. New initiatives therefore need to be targetted on a relatively small number of areas where we can expect to see an improvement. I have asked the Urban Policy Unit at the Cabinet Office to review urgently with Departments the targetting of their existing programmes.

And visits by Ministers

3 At the same time, we need to consider where new initiatives should be located. There are three major new programmes - Housing Action Trusts, Safer Cities and Compacts - where individual projects are currently being worked up. I would like the Cabinet Office Unit to be closely involved, with the responsible Department, in deciding where these should be located. I would also like colleagues to consult the Unit when considering locations under any other initiatives within the £3bn total that we announced in our Action for Cities document.

Private companies

4 Companies have responded well to the Action for Cities launch. I see as a key role for the Cabinet Office Unit exploring with major companies practical ways in which they can help inner city regeneration. Business in the Community and other organisations can be used to ensure that companies get clear guidance about inner city opportunities.

5 Plans are well advanced for the series of breakfast presentations. The first one will be on 13 April in Newcastle. These are specifically aimed at local business leaders and will provide them with comprehensive information about inner city business opportunities. An expanded and free-standing Guide to Action for businessmen is being prepared, jointly with business organisations, based on that included in the Action for Cities

document. I am also hoping to have a private sector secondee located with the Cabinet Office Unit to facilitate their contact with major companies.

Publicity

6 Although much has been done by Departments to ensure that Government gets credit for its effort and investment in inner cities, people are still largely unaware of the extent of its contribution. I would like to see our contribution to inner city projects acknowledged by Departments using prominent Action for Cities signboards on all their projects within the £3bn total and for all related Press Notices to be in the standard Action for Cities format. A format for Press Notices has already been agreed with Departments and I have asked the Cabinet Office Unit to consult Departments on a standard format for signboards.

7 The attached table of Ministerial inner city visits over the next two months shows the considerable scope for getting the message across. This table will be regularly updated and will show the purpose of visits and opportunities for linking announcements and themes for speeches. Again, however, it is essential that the Cabinet Office Unit should try to co-ordinate these visits to achieve the maximum impact. I hope

Departments, who will receive the schedule, will continue to keep the Unit informed of their plans for Ministerial inner city visits. The Unit in turn will give advice about announcements they would like visiting Ministers to consider making during particular visits.

Other Practical Measures

8 I will let you have regular reports on progress with the measures within the £3bn budget, including any additions to the portfolio of success stories. I have asked the Cabinet Office Unit to prepare a schedule showing where and when progress on inner city measures can be expected.

9 I am also arranging for there to be a standard master brief on inner cities for use by Ministers. This will be regularly updated. Area profiles giving facts and figures about individual towns and cities will be made available to Ministers making visits to inner city areas.

10 There is at present no systematic photographic record of inner city projects. I have asked the Cabinet Office Unit to set up a system so that successes in inner cities can be clearly demonstrated through before and after photographs.

Recommendations

11 I therefore propose that:

i) the relevant Departments should consult the Cabinet Office Unit on the location of specific Action for Cities projects, notably Housing Action Trusts, projects under the Safer Cities initiative and Schools-Industry Compacts.

ii) Departments should confirm their agreement to using the Action for Cities Press Notices and should consult the Cabinet Office Unit on a standard format for Action for Cities signboards.

iii) Departments should check the attached table of Ministerial inner city visits and ensure that it is kept up-to-date.

iv) Departments should ensure that all Ministers making visits are provided with the Cabinet Office profile of the city being visited as part of their briefing material.

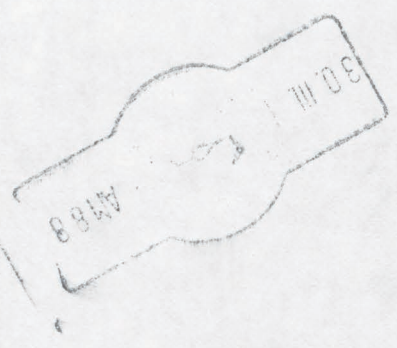
12 I hope you and colleagues are content with these proposals.
I am copying this minute to members of E(UP) and Sir Robin
Butler.



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Attachment Clarke to PM, 3/13/88



Newspaper Article (Privilege)

3.50 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a further statement to make on a matter of privilege.

I have received a complaint from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) about an article in *The Guardian* of Wednesday 2 March. The article, in referring to the absence of Members from the House, made reference to a particular Member, and to Members in general, in terms which I was asked to consider could be regarded as being in contempt of the House.

I have considered this complaint, and have decided that it does raise issues which justify me in giving precedence to a motion relating to it. In consequence, if the hon. Member for Newham, North-West tables such a motion, it will be taken as first business tomorrow.

Inner-city Policy

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order on the statement and the documents relating to it, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today, I made inquiries as to the documents that would be related to the known announcement and was told that they would be available in the Vote Office at 11 am today. Since they were not available at that time, my office made arrangements to collect and deliver them to my town hall, where I was at that time. The only available document in the Vote Office was labelled "City Grant — Simplification of Urban Grants". The press statements and the glossy paper "Action for Cities" were not included.

I understand that the documents were made available in the Vote Office at 3 pm today, but only because I made inquiries about them. I therefore wish to raise the matter of the Prime Minister, who made the statement earlier today in public, not providing Members of Parliament and their borough councils with documents about public announcements, which should be made in the first instance in the House.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that five Departments have supplied documents to the House in connection with the subject matter of this statement, but that the number of copies of at least one proved to be insufficient and has now been supplemented. The House will be aware of the importance that I attach to the timely and adequate supply of papers. I am glad that the earlier deficiency has now been put right.

3.53 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, I should like to make a statement about inner-city policy.

The Government have today announced 12 new Government initiatives and commended three major private sector developments aimed at furthering our policy of renewal and regeneration of the inner cities. We have also published a booklet entitled "Action for Cities" which is a clear guide to the Government's inner-city policies and is intended for use by people prepared to make a contribution to a combined public and private sector effort in this area.

The new Government measures add to existing major regeneration programmes.

First, a new urban development corporation is to be established in the lower Don valley, Sheffield, which will cover 2,000 acres to the north-east of the city centre. It will have a budget of about £50 million over seven years.

Secondly, the area of the Merseyside development corporation is to be doubled by adding 800 acres on both sides of the Mersey. The enlarged MDC could spend between £50 million and £90 million over eight to nine years in the new areas.

Thirdly, two new city action teams are to be set up in Leeds and Nottingham. This adds to the five established three years ago, which have successfully pulled together Government support for enterprise and development in their areas.

Fourthly, a new simplified grant to support private sector developments in inner cities is to be introduced from May 1988. It will replace urban development grant and

hundreds of innocent people in Gibraltar. Will he acknowledge that it shows that terrorism knows no boundaries—that it can strike anyone, anywhere, at any time? The people of Gibraltar may sometimes be irritated by the delays at their frontiers with Spain, but, today's action shows that Spain, Britain and the people of Gibraltar stand together in the fight against terrorism.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We all stand together in the fight against the wicked and continuing threat of terrorism. In that fight we all share a common interest in the freedom of movement across frontiers as far as possible. However, that must always come second to our determination to take whatever action is necessary to prevent terrorism in every way possible.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): As someone who has always opposed terrorism, whether of the IRA or anyone else, and who still condemns terrorism and who, like everybody else in the House, would have been affronted if people had been killed in Gibraltar, can I ask the Foreign Secretary to explain why those three people who, although accepted as members of an active service unit of the IRA, were shot and killed when it was admitted that they were not carrying guns and had not planted any bombs in Gibraltar? Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain why that happened and how that can help us in the fight against terrorism? Will that not help terrorism?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman must stand almost alone in the House in offering that point of view.

Mr. Heffer: Well, I have done that before.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have described the circumstances giving rise to suspicion in this case. I have described the circumstances in which the terrorists were shot. I have made plain to the House the statement by the IRA that the three people were members of an active service unit on active service in Gibraltar. It is difficult to see how I could possibly conclude that the security services could have acted other than they did when faced with the events of that day.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Is my right hon. and learned Friend able to confirm that the co-operation between Madrid and London and the cross-border co-operation between Spain and Gibraltar could not possibly have been better in this case and that that co-operation took place without the existence of an Anglo-Spanish agreement?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I acknowledge the generosity of my hon. Friend's tribute to the co-operation that took place in this case. I acknowledge also his ingenuity in pursuing one argument in whatever circumstances he may find it convenient to do so. As a matter of fact, there are a number of Anglo-Spanish agreements, at least two of which I helped to negotiate, which have helped considerably to increase the prospects of co-operation of the sort that took place.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a continuation of Question Time. There is a statement and a busy day ahead, in which a great many right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part.

Member's Letter (Privilege)

3.49 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a statement to make about the privileges of the House.

I received last week complaints from several hon. Members about the contents of a letter sent by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) to the constituents of certain members of the Standing Committee on the Licensing (Retail Sales) Bill. The letter accused the members concerned of choosing to filibuster on that Bill as a means of obstructing the Abortion (Amendment) Bill. It went on to urge the recipients of the letter to take action to persuade members to desist from conduct which, it was said, "would scandalise millions of people".

The letter from the hon. Member was sent before the proceedings on the Licensing (Retail Sales) Bill had begun, and in my opinion its tone and the manner of its distribution amounted to an attempt to bring unacceptable pressure upon Members of this House in the performance of their duties.

The hon. Member for Mossley Hill has written to every Member concerned and to all those to whom his original letter was addressed, withdrawing any suggestion of a filibuster. He has also made this letter public. In these circumstances, I do not propose to use my power to grant precedence to a motion on this matter. I do, however, wish to give a serious warning about the care which those involved with this Bill on both sides must take to avoid committing contempts of the House by seeking to bring improper pressure upon hon. Members.

In considering the present complaints, I have received considerable evidence of unacceptable conduct by bodies outside the House. Efforts appear to have been made to prevent Members from speaking about matters upon which they must be free to speak in this House, and there has been personal harassment of Members in their constituencies. I wish to make it clear that I shall take very seriously any continuation of this conduct and I urge hon. Members to use their influence to ensure that the merits of business before Parliament can be discussed calmly and responsibly without threats of intimidation.

urban regeneration grant, which have produced from the private sector over £580 million in investment, providing 28,500 jobs and more than 7,000 homes since 1982.

Fifthly, the drive to bring unused and under-used inner-city land onto the market is to be stepped up by requiring publication of information about land in public ownership.

Sixthly, two new inner-city roads costing £109 million, both of which will directly benefit inner cities—a £59 million improvement of the A13 between Limehouse and Dagenham, and a £50 million spine route through the black country to the M5 and M6, have been added to the Government's roads programme.

Seventhly, a major new initiative to tackle crime and the fear of crime will be introduced in 20 inner cities over the next three years; £2.3 million is being made available in the first year to support the initiative, which has been successfully piloted in five urban areas.

Eighthly, more help for small businesses is to be provided, including new offices for the small firms service, a fund to support local enterprise agency projects helping businesses, an 85 per cent. guarantee on bank loans to firms in task force areas, and help to encourage people into self-employment.

Ninthly, the Manpower Services Commission will give financial and other support to 12 inner-city employer-school compacts, in which groups of employers work with schools to guarantee a job with training for all young people aged 16 to 18 leaving school who meet agreed motivation and achievement standards.

Tenthly, we will be revising our help to unemployed people in inner cities. There will be more MSC and employment service staff working in local communities advising and helping residents, new information points to guide people on training and jobs, and special training in literacy and numeracy and English as a second language. There will be new measures to increase the involvement of employers in training.

Eleventhly, we will be making extra provision of premises for new businesses in rundown inner cities. English Estates, in partnership with private companies, will set up managed workshops. Up to £11 million of public funding will go into the programme in the first year.

Twelfthly, we will be building on our efforts to work with the private sector. The Government are organising a series of breakfast presentations to leading business men up and down the country, starting in Newcastle on 13 April. A free telephone link has been set up today so that businesses can find out from a single contact point how they can play their part.

The Government measures announced today build on the programmes and initiatives introduced since 1979 to tackle urban dereliction and inner-city decay, and to raise skills and encourage enterprise. In all, about £3,000 million will go to support urban regeneration in Britain in 1988-89, bringing in several times that total in private investment.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Is it not typical of this tawdry exercise that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement should end with the ludicrous assertion that coffee and cornflakes with Ministers will somehow provide the sustenance that the inner cities desperately need?

Why is the right hon. and learned Gentleman making the statement and not the Prime Minister, whose

responsibility it is? Why was the Prime Minister so keen to spearhead the media hype this morning, yet so reluctant to face the House of Commons this afternoon? Is it because she knows that glossy brochures cannot conceal the simple fact that there is virtually no new money; no new proposals; no White Paper; no legislation; and no involvement of the local communities—in short, that there is almost nothing to offer hope to the people in the inner cities? Is it because after identifying, perhaps unwisely, an electoral problem on election night nine months ago, she now finds that she does not have the faintest idea how to tackle the real social and human problems in the inner cities that have been created by her policies?

Is it because the right hon. Lady knows that the only way to help the inner cities is to abandon the policies that have already caused so much damage and, in particular, to overcome her obsessive antipathy both to local government and to public spending? Is it because she knows that soft words from construction companies, which happen to include many major donors to the Tory party, are no substitute for involving those who really matter—local communities and their elected representatives?

How much longer will the Prime Minister turn her back on the consensus that has now emerged, which includes the Prince of Wales, the Church of England, local government and private developers, to the effect that a partnership that fully involves local government and local communities, as well as private capital, is the only way forward?

When did the right hon. and learned Gentleman first discover the awful truth that his much-touted White Paper had been torn up and that, as the Minister left without any clothes, his simple role was to shelter behind the Prime Minister's skirts? Is it not the case that changes in benefit and the poll tax will have a much greater impact, for the worse on the inner cities than anything that has been announced today?

When will the Prime Minister, who is surprisingly not present to hear this statement, abandon her ideological prejudices and produce the new resources, new policies and new partnership that alone can help to rescue the people in the inner cities from the poverty, unemployment, disorder, slum housing and despair to which her policies have condemned them?

Mr. Clarke: There is an awful air of sour grapes in the Labour party's reaction to what we have announced. I thought that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) summed up the right note of pessimism and cynicism, which he and his colleagues tried to whip up over the weekend, but he was unable to put much energy into it.

The hon. Gentleman criticises the booklet that we have produced. I commend it to him and I believe that he might read it some time with profit—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is it?"] As Mr. Speaker explained, the copies in the Library this morning went rapidly, but hundreds of copies are now in the Vote Office. I am delighted that there is such demand for it.

If the Opposition parties were asked to set down their policies for the inner cities they could not fill the back of a postage stamp. If they wished to hold a conference to explain those policies to anyone, they would not fill a telephone box. The hon. Gentleman comes out with his usual litany of, "Where is the money? Where are the new proposals?" As I said in my statement, we are spending £3

[Mr. Clarke]

billion in the next financial year on urban regeneration. The new programmes announced today come within that total, but they represent about £250 million directed into new policy areas—targeted on the inner cities—that we have not announced before.

I set out a statement explaining the 12 propositions that we have announced today. However, the hon. Gentleman did not ask me a question about one of them.

Mr. Gould: Where are the new proposals?

Mr. Clarke: I will answer the hon. Gentleman's question when he states which of the propositions he is against. Is it simply the fact that he objects to the timing of meetings with business men at breakfast time? Does he object to the Government going to provincial cities and seeking to revive private-sector leadership in urban regeneration?

The hon. Gentleman should read our document. It is not a White Paper, because it is intended to be an action document to be used by those concerned with inner-city revival. When he has read it, he might know more about the subject and will be able to make a better job of questioning our policies the next time round.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): May I tell my right hon. and learned Friend that his statement will be widely welcomed on the Conservative Benches and also by the all-party Environment Select Committee? That Committee recommended three things that my right hon. and learned Friend has adopted today—the expansion of the number of UDCs, the simplification of the three types of urban land grant and the greater use of the “domesday book” of property in public ownership. Will the simplified city grant be demand-led, as the Committee requested? Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that the “domesday book” is not limited by a minimum size of land to be registered in it?

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for his commendation for what we have done. I recall that the all-party Select Committee, including members such as himself, has been pressing for three of the specific changes that we have made.

The existing UDCs have been hugely successful, and I am sure that the two new UDCs will be welcomed in South Yorkshire and on Merseyside, where they have a great deal to offer. The amounts to be spent on city grant will largely depend on the response that we receive from developers coming forward seeking the grant. We have simplified the various types of grant that we currently have available so that grant can be paid more quickly in response to applications to speed up the process. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that more and more developers are acquiring confidence in the ability to invest on inner-city land, and the new simplified grant will help speed up the process.

With regard to the register of land, I shall refer the details to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I believe that no minimum size will be placed upon it. My hon. Friend rightly underlines that all our announcements will receive widespread approval from people seriously interested in the subject. I still wait to hear—I am not sure that I will—any member of the Opposition get up and say that he disagrees with a solitary

one of the propositions that we have made. All they are doing is sitting there, embittered, because they cannot think of what to say in reply and they are trying to pour general scorn on the whole thing.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Although a sincere interest in the inner cities is welcome, is not the watchword of the Government's announcement “power away from the people.”? Does not the best experience from home and abroad demonstrate that one does best for inner cities when local people, local councils, local businesses and the local voluntary sector are involved? Is it not evidence of the Government's dishonesty that they have taken two local schemes—the urban regeneration in Sheffield conducted by the city council and the ILEA education-business compact—and pretended that they are their own? Partnership has been ignored. Surely the truth behind the Government's initiative is that, instead of giving power to the people in the inner cities, they are more determined to advantage their friends and themselves rather than the urban poor and disadvantaged?

Mr. Clarke: First of all, I agree with the broad proposition that policies make best progress when they are conducted in agreement with local people of good will; that is what our inner-city policies do. [Laughter.] Of course it is. Anyone who takes the trouble to involve themselves in the work of our inner-city task forces or the city action teams, or who considers the people who are on the UDCs and the way in which local authorities tend to welcome such things happening in their areas, would agree. Not all local authorities enter into that partnership: that is the difference between our experience and that of the Americans. Obviously it will be greatly to the advantage of the inner-city revival when all local authorities are genuinely business-friendly, prepared to cooperate, keep down the costs they impose on business and join in the effort.

It simply is not the case that we have stolen the credit from other people. The Sheffield UDC will bring to a derelict area in the Don Valley the ability of a UDC to assemble land for grant, to give it positive value and to take decisions quickly. There is no doubt that UDC spending is up.

The idea that compact is an invention of ILEA is an extraordinary proposition. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) knows that it came from Boston in the United States—[Interruption.] I am delighted to know that we have people who are keen on the Boston compact, however stridently. It was introduced into this country by the London enterprise agency with support from people in government. It is to ILEA's credit that it has agreed to become party to it.

I should have thought that, with ILEA as a party to it, there would be no one Left-wing enough in the country who would be hostile to the idea of more compacts elsewhere. The new idea today, which comes from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, is that Government money from the MSC will extend the compact idea to 12 other cities. That is a new, positive idea and it should be welcomed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that no fewer than 36 right hon. and hon.

Members wish to speak in the subsequent debate. May I ask hon. Members to direct single questions to the Minister, which will give me the opportunity to call more of them?

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that those Conservative Members who represent city seats will welcome the package of measures that he has announced, as will the thousands of people who live in the areas targeted by the new initiatives? Does he agree that, once the huffing and puffing is out of the way, the Labour party will work happily with urban development corporations and the city action teams, and that Labour Members will be queuing up for the new city grant as long as it is to be spent in their constituencies?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. That has been our experience so far, and I am sure that it will be again. The huffing and puffing that we hear from the Labour Benches is strangely out of line with the practice on the ground, even among Labour supporters.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that there is a sense of disappointment and let-down, because we were expecting a proper White Paper? All that we have is this mouse of a consultation paper on grants, which shows confusion in the Government, a lack of clarity and no new money.

Is the Minister aware that 96 per cent. of the population of the London borough of Newham live outside the development area, that the borough comprises half the traditional east end of London, that this morning the borough council composed a letter to him about the plight of the borough and that, on Friday, I have an Adjournment debate on this very subject, when I shall ask for co-operation between the Government and the council to tackle the borough's problems? Will the Minister give me a guarantee that he will seriously consider both initiatives—he will receive the letter tomorrow—and respond adequately?

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman is such an avid reader of White Papers. I did not want a White Paper, because a White Paper is suitable—[*Laughter.*] Perhaps from the laughter of the Leader of the Opposition we now know what their policy is: they would produce a White Paper. White Papers are almost as unread as Acts of Parliament. It is an extremely suitable document when one is contemplating a change in legislation, but it is usually published, read the next day and never referred to again by anyone.

What we have produced is not a consultation document, as the hon. Gentleman described it. He should obtain a copy—[*Interruption.*] He has one. He should obtain the full document about which we are talking, a copy of which is being waved by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). It is a full exposition of a complete package of policies, covering a wide range of activities.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's latter point, may I say that I am delighted to hear him lobbying for Newham to be allowed to join in the Government's policies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) said a moment ago, I expect that that will be the response of most Labour Members the moment this afternoon's session is over. Everyone will be queuing up trying to get similar announcements made for their areas.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there will be a warm welcome for the provision of more small nursery units for starter firms? For too long, it has been too difficult to find the right premises on the right terms, and what he suggested today will go a long way to meeting that problem, which will then create more new firms and jobs.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. A variety of such units has been provided so far, and they have been such a success in practice that we thought it important to find a new way of putting extra public finance and a new agency, English Estates, into providing more of them. The present state of the economy makes it easier for small businesses to start up and expand, and we must give special support to that in the inner cities.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Minister consider a special problem and answer more directly the point made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)? I represent an inner-city area. Like many others in the House, two weekends a month I hold constituency surgeries, and 98 per cent. of the issues discussed are local matters. They include jobs, unemployment—[HON. MEMBERS: "And housing."] And housing. Along come the Minister's officials to Leeds to define an urban development corporation area. No one consults us. I talk to the councillors and ask, "What areas have been designated?" They say, "No one discussed it with us." Along come those civil servants, operating from the middle of Leeds and knowing nothing about the area. Everything is imposed from above. If that is the way the Government intend to set about it, it will just be another glossy magazine that will not work.

Mr. Clarke: The city action team for Leeds comprises the regional officers of the Department, all of whom know the area extremely well and all of whom have constant—almost daily—contact with the local authorities in the area—

Mr. Rees: Action now.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry if the right hon. Gentleman has not been consulted recently, but he must know the regional officers of the Department in his city. They are not outsiders. They work in Leeds.

The urban development corporation has been announced and should be welcomed by people in Leeds, because it will speed redevelopment and bring back into active use derelict land in the city. There is a task force on the ground in the middle of Leeds, staffed by people who live and work in Leeds who have the closest contact with many voluntary bodies and with the local authorities. When I visit various bodies in Leeds, I frequently meet the leader of the council and people from the local authority and discuss these matters.

I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman if he has been left out of discussions recently, but he need only contact any of those bodies or me, and we shall happily keep him abreast of what we are doing.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): On behalf of the Conservative Back-Bench urban and inner-city committee, may I warmly congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on doing a magnificent job in promoting urban and inner-city regeneration? Unlike the Opposition, may I offer a constructive suggestion that might help the

[*Mr. Anthony Steen*]

Government to get rid of some of the derelict and vacant land in public ownership? Has my right hon. and learned Friend considered privatising public land, passing it to a private company and giving the value of the land, in the shape of a share certificate, to the public authority so that the private company can market the land and regenerate the inner city?

Mr. Clarke: The proposals that we have announced are designed to ensure that the large amounts of public land that are still derelict and vacant should be brought into productive use more quickly. I shall pass my hon. Friend's commendable suggestion to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, if it turns out that the latest moves in relation to the register do not have the desired effect of speeding the release of public land for development.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): May I welcome the extension of the Merseyside development corporation to Birkenhead, and ask the Minister for two undertakings? Will he draw the attention of the MDC to the wish of many of my constituents to live in the centre of the town which, at present, having been handed over to the private sector, is an industrial desert? Secondly, when the redevelopment is carried out, will the planning powers be handed back to the local authority?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman's reaction to the extension of the urban development corporation into his constituency is in line with that of most local authorities, of all political persuasions, in all the recent extensions. We hope that things can be achieved on his side of the Mersey in line with what has been achieved in the Albert dock and the surrounding area on the other side of the Mersey. I share his desire to see as wide a range as possible of people living in the centres of cities and towns, but we must ensure that those who live in derelict inner-city areas are not people who are there because they have no choice and who would leave the moment they were given an alternative. We need a good mix of development in the centres of towns to get the mix of population that we require. Once the work of the UDCs is over—they will not be timeless organisations—I expect that the planning powers will revert to the local authorities.

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that this is clearly a good day for inner cities? Does he further accept that I am lobbying on behalf of Lambeth? We need a mini UDC at Waterloo, where the new rail terminal of the Channel tunnel debouches, and we need a housing action trust in Brixton. May I visit my right hon. and learned Friend some time and discuss it with him?

Mr. Clarke: Lambeth is already included in the area served by the city action team. Both the points made by my hon. Friend are relevant to the well-being of the people of Lambeth. I suggest that he arranges a meeting with my colleagues at the Department of the Environment, to whom both his questions should be directed, and I am sure that they will take note of what he says. Housing action trusts are an important new development which will be taken further this year, and in due course my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will

announce where those housing action trusts are to be set up. I shall draw my hon. Friend's suggestion to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Is the Minister aware that, last week, I met officers of the North Peckham task force? Does he understand that people in Peckham are angry because, during the past two years, the Government have removed £20 million from Southwark council yet they expect to be congratulated on the fact that, during the same two years, they have put in less than £1 million through the task force? Why are the Government prepared to put £700 million of public money into the London Docklands development corporation to attract private capital for luxury housing yet they are not prepared to give the £18 million that is desperately needed to rebuild the Gloucester Grove estate or the £18 million that is needed to lift the threat of asbestos that hangs over the tenants of the Willowbrook estate? Is not his statement a cynical public relations exercise which shows that the Government are concerned about profit, property and politics, not about people and poverty?

Mr. Clarke: I owe the hon. Lady an apology. At this morning's press conference someone referred to her attacks on the North Peckham task force and I said that for two years she had not bothered to meet it or to discover what it was doing. She has now discovered that it is spending money, organising training and job opportunities, and targeting a great deal of money into north Peckham. I am delighted that the hon. Lady has crossed the threshold. I hope that she does not lose the nomination for her seat as a result of being seen talking to departmental officials. If she follows up these matters, she will find that much good will continue to come from the North Peckham task force.

The hon. Lady mentioned some estates in her constituency that suffer from some of the worst combinations of social and other problems of which I am aware anywhere in the United Kingdom. I am sure that she shares my pleasure that such large grants from Estate Action, for example, are being made available to improve the Gloucester Grove estate. I am delighted also that the hon. Lady is now aware of the existence of the London Docklands development corporation, which has been shunned by most of the politicians in Southwark ever since it was established and began to revive part of their area.

If the hon. Lady continues to learn more about the inner-city policies that are being applied in her constituency, I am sure that we shall be able to welcome her co-operation and support.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that many in Birmingham and the west midlands will welcome action for cities? Regional development grants always acted against our best interests. The city grants are bound to be useful to us.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to take a word of advice from those of us in Birmingham and the west midlands. If he could stop my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment from giving one permission after another for incursions into the green belt—all builders want to build on easy ground rather than difficult ground—the tens of thousands of acres of derelict land in the midlands would be taken up more quickly without any cost to the Government. As long as

my right hon. Friend gives easy work to builders, they will continue to build in Solihull and Meriden rather than in difficult areas in the west midlands.

Mr. Clarke: I am always grateful to my hon. Friend for his advice on Birmingham. I am glad that he welcomes the new city grants. A great deal of effort is going into inner-city Birmingham through the task force in Handsworth and through the support that we are giving to the Birmingham heartlands attempt to rebuild on the derelict land around Saltley. The local authority, central Government and the private sector are working closely together. I shall draw my hon. Friend's opinions on planning policy in the west midlands to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Is the Minister aware of the work of Sally Holterman on the nature of urban deprivations and inner-city problems, which shows that all these areas are merely a concentration of poor people? We have a Government who have increased unemployment, poverty, and low pay and worsened the housing stock, and that is why the inner cities have become worse. The gimmicks that have been announced will not address the fundamental problems. We shall use any money that we can get, of course, but it is the Government who are damaging inner cities and making the problem worse. The Government's gimmicks will not put right that which is wrong.

Mr. Clarke: I have not read the work to which the hon. Lady referred and I do not agree with the analysis that has been put forward, if the hon. Lady has described it accurately, as I am sure she has. I do not agree with the proposition that the only problem in inner cities is poverty and that all that we need to do is to alleviate poverty, there being no need for other policies. [HON. MEMBERS: "She did not say that."] I do not accept either the Right-wing proposition that we need only to make the country better off as a whole without making any special effort in the inner cities.

The hon. Lady knows that we are taking positive action in her constituency to bring the unemployed into contact with work experience and training opportunities—

Ms. Clare Short: Just 12 jobs in Broughton road, which the Minister talks about constantly.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has already put her question to the Minister.

Mr. Clarke: I shall be happy to introduce the hon. Lady to other projects apart from the excellent Broughton road one, of which I am satisfied she has knowledge. A great deal is happening in her constituency, with the result that unemployment is steadily dropping and deprivation is becoming less. I am sure that we can improve the quality of life in her constituency and in other parts of inner-city Birmingham if we increase our efforts.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaugh): My right hon. and learned Friend will know from his own experience that Teesside has enjoyed an urban development corporation for the past six months, and that as a consequence there has been a complete change in the atmosphere surrounding the economics of the region. We already see new entrepreneurs and new businesses coming into the area. It was significant that on the one o'clock news today

on Radio Cleveland it was announced that there were no further sites left in north Teesside, in Hartlepool, for a company that wants to build a factory there to expand.

Given the expansion that is taking place in the area, it is disappointing that the Government continue to neglect the north-east by failing to recognise the need for a three-lane motorway from the south to the north along the east coast.

Mr. Clarke: The new Teesside urban development corporation appears to be making the fastest progress. The enterprise zone has been of great benefit there. The task forces in Middlesbrough and Hartlepool have both been welcomed and they are doing a considerable amount of work. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a welcome change to read that there are shortages of factory accommodation for the expanding businesses in the region. However, that is a problem and we must ascertain what we can do to tackle it. I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport the remarks of my hon. Friend about the need to improve the great north road to take the ever-increasing traffic to the booming north east.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): If the urban development grant has been the success that the Minister claims, why is it being scrapped? Why is he undermining the work of local authorities such as Newcastle city council, which has a good record of co-operation with the private sector, in favour of extending the powers of the colonial government in the north, the urban development corporation? This will mean that new schemes will be development-led rather than planning-led, which leads many of us to fear the return of old-style corruption to the region.

Mr. Clarke: I think that urban development grant has been a considerable success, as was its short-lived successor, urban regeneration grant. The new city grant is a process of deregulation. We are simplifying the procedures for applying for it and we hope to speed up the payment of grant for desirable development, which should be welcomed.

Urban development corporations should not be seen as the imposition of some sort of penalty on areas. They are seen as such only by a few officers in the local planning department. They have a proven track record of success in hastening the clearance of derelict land and introducing new developments. I am sure that my right hon. Friend has done a favour to the north-east by setting up a regional development corporation in the area and that residents will quickly come to appreciate that.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend add to the register of unused building land that is owned by local authorities the unused building land and houses that are owned by the Ministry of Defence? Some of the land has lain empty for many years.

Mr. Clarke: I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I am sure that he and I are agreed that it is wrong for any unused land, housing or other sorts of building to stay in the hands of a public body for more than the essential length of time. All our efforts are designed to ensure that all unused land and buildings are put back into productive use as soon as possible.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Is the Minister aware that the announced budget for Sheffield, which will enable a partnership of public and private bodies to revitalise an important but old industrial area, is extremely important, although it is a budget that might have to be re-examined in future? It could have been welcomed by the Sheffield district council and it is unfortunate that that body has been by-passed.

Why must the right hon. and learned Gentleman introduce the UDC? He is aware of the talks that it has had with his Department in recent years and he knows that the council needs only the budget that he has announced. The council has provided leadership and has set the right example. It is willing to co-operate with the private sector and the evidence shows that that sector is responsive, and might be more responsive to the approaches of the city council than to those of the Minister. What response does he expect his civil servants to get from private bodies in Sheffield when they are not sure whether the council will be in a position to continue to provide leadership in what is supposed to be a democratic community?

Mr. Clarke: Urban development corporations can take decisions more quickly and produce results faster than the processes of local government in the cities where my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State has established UDCs. Once Sheffield city council and responsible people in Sheffield give a few moments' thought to the implications of today's announcement, they will realise that it should be welcomed. I am sure that my right hon. and noble Friend will welcome their co-operation in taking forward the work of the Don Valley UDC.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): The many thousands who use the A13 each day will welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement of the improvement between Dagenham and Limehouse—perhaps the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) will welcome it to. When does he expect work to start? If it is to start earlier than 1992, can he extend it a bit further, to Rainham?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) should be more enthusiastic about something that eases traffic jams between here and Dagenham. One problem is that the success of the London Docklands development corporation has added considerably to congestion on the roads going out to the east. This is an important follow-up to the improvement of the roads by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

The timing is a matter for my right hon. Friend, who is confined by the large number of statutory procedures that must be gone through before a road can be built. If the local inhabitants ease the passage of the road and there are not too many pointless objections—there is bound to be a great deal of consultation about the route—it can be built more quickly. I shall draw my right hon. Friend's attention to my hon. Friend's point about the timing.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In respect of urban development corporations, should not the Chancellor of the Duchy think again? They are unelected centralised quangoes.

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the London Docklands development corporation, which he

has mentioned, has suffered a number of spectacular resignations, including that of the chief executive, who resigned after less than a fortnight? Is he aware that the Comptroller and Auditor General is preparing a report for possible presentation to the Public Accounts Committee on the LDDC's accounts? Would it not be wise for him to wait and see what the Public Accounts Committee says before he lays further orders for places such as Sheffield and Leeds?

Mr. Clarke: Like me, the hon. Gentleman remembers what the docklands area of London was like only six or seven years ago, when vast expanses of water lay idle and unused, surrounded by derelict warehouses that were rarely visited by ships and were surrounded by further areas of dereliction. My judgment at the time was that the prospects of rapid progress being made in reviving that area by the combined efforts of the Port of London authority and three local authorities involved were next to nil—

Mr. Spearing: It was being developed.

Mr. Clarke: On a trivial scale.

Of course, the London Docklands development corporation is a public body and must be subject to the PAC. It may have had its administrative difficulties, but if the hon. Gentleman goes to the heart of docklands now and sees how transformed it has been, what a model it is for urban regeneration and what a tribute it is to the work of all those involved, he should perhaps reconsider some of his continual snide criticisms of it.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): As a former Conservative leader of an inner-London borough, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his initiative and assure him that we ignore the ragbag of carping, vacuous comments from the Opposition who have been in power in most of the inner cities for most of the past 50 years? Does my right hon. and learned Friend remember that one of the problems facing the inner cities in the past has been that there has not been enough private housing for those who wish to live there? One of the successes of the LDDC has been the bringing back to the inner city of people who wish to own their homes.

Mr. Clarke: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. It is desirable that there should be the right mix of housing and population in all the inner cities—of people who have chosen to own their own homes or flats and who have chosen to rent in the private or public sector. That is the tenor of the housing parts of the document that we issued today.

I have already agreed with my hon. Friend's comments about the Opposition. I did not think there would be any specific objections to anything. I am almost tempted to ask my right hon. Friend to take away the urban development corporations from the constituencies of hon. Members who have grumbled—but I do not think I shall do so. They would all change their minds overnight if he did.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House of new moneys and measures that will affect Wales and Scotland? I challenge him to name one measure that affects Wales? Where is his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland? Where is the Governor-General for Wales? Are we to have a statement from him tomorrow?

Mr. Clarke: It is true that the 12 announcements I have made do not include any that were relevant to Wales or Scotland, but there is a page on Wales and Scotland in the document, and a great package of proposals for which my right hon. and right hon. and learned Friends are responsible.

Scotland contains some of the best examples of urban regeneration in this country—particularly in Glasgow. What is being done with the urban development corporation in Cardiff, in Swansea bay, and with my right hon. Friend's proposals for the valleys, is equally ambitious. As we have devolved government in this country, those things are the responsibility of my right hon. and right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give us his assurance that local authorities will not be permitted to enter into purely artificial schemes with third parties to develop land, under which the tenants of the houses subsequently built will not be permitted to exercise their rights to buy under the Housing Act 1980?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend raises a serious point. There is a problem of local authorities seeking to evade the right to buy or the tenants' choice of landlord in future years. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is anxiously considering this, and I shall refer my hon. Friend's comments to him. No doubt he will consider what proposals to bring forward.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Minister aware that what will cause concern about his statement to those of us who represent and care about the inner cities is what is absent from it? We know only too well that, since 1979, we have lost £7 billion in rate support grant and £8 billion in housing investment programme, which would have built 150,000 houses. This document contains no proposals for any new money, and it insults the people of the inner cities.

Are not large areas of policy that are essential to regenerating the inner city missing from the document? One is transport. What is there in the document to develop and build up public transport?

Finally—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Lady has had a good run. Many other hon. Members wish to ask questions, and I am trying to get them all in.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Lady is not the first person to produce all those figures about lost rate support grant, housing allocations and so on. Although, fortunately, I do not usually have to face them, I regard them as—on the whole—bogus, based as they are on suppositions about what level of grant would have been paid if certain actions had been taken by local government. We allocate grants to local government according to objective assessment of need. It is true that some local authorities have gone into penalty and lost grant, but that is not a valid comparison to make with the measures announced today.

As for transport, I have mentioned two important roads, but there are other references to transport in the document, which I commend to the hon. Lady. They include references to the London Docklands development corporation's light rapid transit scheme—the railway that goes out to docklands—and to the fact that the

Government are looking, with Manchester, at a proposal that a similar rail network might be set up in inner Manchester.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Does my right hon. and learned Friend's American experience bear out the views of many—that one of the greatest threats to inner cities and to employment in them are out-of-town shopping centres?

Mr. Clarke: In certain circumstances, I have no doubt that that proposition can be argued, but I suspect that my hon. Friend is skilfully trying to draw me into some planning dispute in his locality. I shall draw his views to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will no doubt consider them carefully, if indeed my hon. Friend has a proposition on hand in the neighbourhood of Stockport.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The glossy document "Action For Cities", which I had to get from friends who are journalists because it was not issued to the House of Commons, says that the new Merseyside development corporation will cover the north docks and Parliament street in Liverpool. What does that mean? Parliament street is a residential area of council houses, which are now about to be pulled down by the present Labour authority in that city and replaced with good council houses. Does it mean that the Labour authority, elected by the people, will now receive enough money from the Government to help it carry out its programme; or does it mean that that land will be taken over by an unelected authority and handed over to private enterprise, which will do a great deal of damage to local people?

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman also explain what he means when he says that the north docks will also be taken over by this authority because of the great work that has been done by the authority up to now? We are talking about an unelected authority. What great work has it done? It has done some work, but how many jobs and how much industry has it produced, and what has it done to rehabilitate industry in Merseyside?

Mr. Clarke: I concede that the hon. Gentleman knows more about the exact geography of Parliament street, Liverpool than I do. I shall refer his detailed inquiry to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will no doubt give the hon. Gentleman a specific answer. The hon. Gentleman attacked what he called an unelected urban development corporation for Liverpool's docks. His comments were wide of the mark. The redevelopment that has already been done in Liverpool docks by the Merseyside urban development corporation is one of the best things that has happened in Liverpool in many years.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): While I welcome the summary of the Government's actions so far, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to look urgently at the question of the supply of industrial space in the north-east? Could he not use the powers that he already has to organise a public auction of land to bring forward suitable factory space? Would it not be more sensible for factory space to be made available in the north-east at about a third or a half of the rental level in the south-east, given that a much higher proportion of the work force are unemployed in the north-east?

Mr. Clarke: We have not cut at all the activities of English Estates in helping to produce factory accommodation in the north-east. There has not until recently been a shortage of industrial land in the north-east. Obviously, one hopes that as quickly as possible there will be a reaction to the growing demand and that we shall see the necessary factory and office buildings coming on to the market. It is a problem that needs to be tackled by the private and public sectors. I can only reflect that it is a novel problem for the north-east that industrial expansion there is going on so quickly that we are beginning to get the first shortages of land and buildings.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Minister realise that his statement will be taken as a sick joke on Merseyside, given that this Government abolished Merseyside county council which did more for private business than the Government have ever done and that the Government robbed the city of over £300 million in rate support grant? Can he say when the Government will enter into real partnership with the real people of Merseyside—its elected councillors? Can he tell us how many disabled people looking for a telephone or adaptations to their homes, people seeking housing repairs and those looking for real jobs will be happy with his statement?

Mr. Clarke: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. People will just have to judge the respective contributions to well-being on Merseyside made on the one hand by Merseyside urban development corporation, and on the other hand by Liverpool city council under its recent Militant control. The announcement I made today, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is about to extend the urban development corporation on both sides of the Mersey, should be welcomed by most people in that area. If what the hon. Gentleman says is any sign of a mellowing on the part of Liverpool Labour party towards the private sector and the attracting of new enterprise, it is a welcome sign. If the council could make itself more business-friendly and help redress the bad reputation that it has given to the city in the last few years, that would do a great deal of good.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As the mould of Socialism is dependent for its growth on the feedstock of dereliction and decay, is not the hostility and ill-humour of the party opposite explained by the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend's statement today is a very grave threat to their few remaining strongholds?

Mr. Clarke: There is a mixed bag of motives on the Opposition side, and a mixed bag of responses. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, at its worst, when one finds real extremists inside the Labour party in some of our cities, they are people who have a personal commitment to making sure that nothing works and who feel that their political base lies in dereliction and decay. At its worst, that becomes quite a serious problem.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): Does the Minister agree that more and more young people doing valuable and essential jobs — nurses, electricians, postmen, teachers—are being driven out of London because of a lack of affordable housing? Does he further agree that, unless this problem is tackled, inner London will never be regenerated and, sadly, its work force will be depleted? Does he think that his proposals will redress that fundamental problem?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Lady's assertion. This is an extremely serious problem. That is why we are proposing reforms in housing legislation so as to make sure that there is a variety of housing in London and that the number of organisations and landlords providing private rented accommodation should be greatly extended. We also need to tackle the question of the payment of people in London who perform some of these essential public services compared with payments in other parts of the country.

I am glad to see that the idea of more regional differentiation in the pay of people in these great public services is again a live issue. Today's proposals will make a further contribution, and in all we do we must pay attention to the points that the hon. Lady has made. We need a good mix of housing in London, offering the right choice in order to attract a variety of employed and self-employed people to the city.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the inner cities have been the major victim of the doctrinaire policies of extremist local authorities, which have frustrated development by hoarding land, which have destroyed jobs through high rates and whose educational policies have failed a whole generation? Does he further agree that the only hope for inner cities lies not in the nostrums of Opposition Members but in the proposals that he has announced, in the uniform business rate and in the Education Reform Bill?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. Certainly, some councils deserve all the strictures that he has applied. Our policies are based on the proposition that we need to bring the enterprise economy into the inner cities. That has been successful in reviving the national economy as a whole. It can be a success in the inner cities if the same principles are applied consistently by the Government and by leading people in business throughout Britain. Following my hon. Friend's analysis, it is obvious that many Opposition Members still have to be converted to his view and need to realise that many of their friends in local government have done far more damage than good.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Will the Minister allow a public inquiry into improvements on the A13 and, in particular, the proposed docklands highway spine road? Is he aware of the considerable opposition in my constituency to the proposed docklands highway, which will destroy badly needed houses and cause misery to people who will continue to live along the route? My constituents consider that this will be a gift of a huge amount of public money to Olympia and York to bring people into the area from outside to work in the new offices. That money should be used to provide jobs for local people and much-needed houses. Is he aware that my constituents think that the Government's proposals will bring as much benefit to the east end as a plague?

Mr. Clarke: Of course the choice of route for a new road in an urban area is an extremely sensitive matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will go through all the processes of consultation and the statutory procedures as this road is promoted and brought near to being built. I hope that the hon. Lady will play a constructive part in all this. There is a danger that sometimes some of the community activists in the east of

London and elsewhere are very clear about what they are against: they are against most things that involve any change in their neighbourhood. There needs to be a positive surge to find solutions to the traffic problems that urban regeneration in east London is causing.

Ms. Gordon: My constituents know what they want. They want houses and jobs.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): One significant difference between urban development grant and urban regeneration grant is that the latter bypasses local authorities. Will the new grant bypass local authorities? Secondly, much of the bias of the Minister's policy is directed at the development of vacant and derelict land and does not help boroughs such as Lambeth, which have very little such land left.

What specifically is in it for Lambeth? Will there be any compensation for the 13 per cent. cut in the urban development assistance that we had last year, for the doubling of the burden that will come as a result of the poll tax, or for the shocking housing conditions that we have as a result of cuts in housing investment programmes over the last nine years?

Mr. Clarke: Obviously the new city grant will be administered by the Department of the Environment in consultation with local authorities when it considers possible suitable sites for development. It is true that, unlike urban development grant, it will not require local authority consent before it can be given. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, a few local authorities still simply refuse to put forward applications for urban development grant because they are against the Government giving any help to redevelopment in their areas. The hon. Gentleman asked, "What's in it for Lambeth?" There is a great deal of empty and derelict housing stock in Lambeth. I am sure that the Government's proposals on housing policy will have a beneficial effect on that borough.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I do not need glossy publications with soft-lighted pictures of "Mama Doc" on page two to inform me about the inner-city problems in Newham. I have to live with those problems daily. They arise directly from Government policies. Newham has lost £127 million in rate support grant since 1979. Poverty and unemployment have doubled since 1979. Those are the root causes of the problems in inner city areas. Why does the Minister not just come clean and tell us that the statement is part of the process of dismantling Labour-controlled local authorities in the inner cities—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear."] Exactly—and turning them over to Tory business men to take decisions behind closed doors? What is more, they will even get free breakfasts for doing that.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so upset by the pictures. May I commend the words to him? If he reads the words between the pictures, he will discover that his description of the document is something of a parody.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster aware that the official unemployment figures show that 16 out of every 100 of my constituents of working age are unemployed and that many of those in work have low-paid, part-time jobs involving night and weekend working and that they include a group of men and women who — it was

revealed last week — are earning 12p for every kilo of onions that they peel? Whether they are men and women desperately looking for work or people peeling onions for 12p a kilo, they understand that the city of Bradford has declined as a result of the millions of pounds that have been taken from the local economy through cuts in rate support grant, housing benefit and social security payments. Is he aware that they will not take seriously the Government's promise to regenerate the inner cities until and unless substantial amounts of new money are pumped into Bradford to create new, better paid jobs that offer some promise to the people who have them?

Mr. Clarke: I simply do not agree with the proposition put forward by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), and by others, that somehow the inner-city problems have been created by cuts in rate support grant by the Government. The inner-city problems are long-standing and are a reflection of a long-standing industrial and commercial decline in some places. The Member does not do justice to the city of Bradford, which has mainly been affected by the industrial recession and the decline of the textile industry in west Yorkshire, upon which in the past it was too dependent. It is now bouncing back very well. It has done much to help itself and it will receive added support from the Government through the new city action team that I have announced today, which will be based in Leeds and will serve both Leeds and Bradford.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As we heard earlier, the Prime Minister chaired a press conference at which she presided over at least six of her Cabinet Ministers, one of whom has just provided us with a statement during which, in his replies to questions, he referred to no fewer than 11 of his colleagues to whom he said that he would refer matters raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In anticipation of that kind of problem, efforts were made, as you know, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the Prime Minister would come to the Dispatch Box to answer the variety of questions about a matter which she is supposed to be co-ordinating. Those efforts were not productive.

However, I read shortly after midday today on the Press Association tapes:

"Later today the Prime Minister faces an emergency Commons question about the initiative".

I know that there is a well-established and entirely understandable convention that you, Mr. Speaker, do not comment on any possible applications for private notice questions. However, given the completely unsatisfactory nature of the Minister's responses this afternoon and the number of references that he has been forced to make to his right hon. Friends, and the fact that the person who chaired the press conference this morning could not be here to answer questions this afternoon, will you give your view on the advisability of multidepartmental press conferences and the failure subsequently to provide the House of Commons with at least the facility offered to the press and broadcasting media?

Mr. Speaker: I had not anticipated that the right hon. Gentleman would raise a point of order. I thought that he was going to put a question to the Minister. I believe that those questions are for the Minister rather than for me.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully it will be a more helpful point of order than the one that we have just had. It concerns the hon. Member

[Mr. Marlow]

for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). Obviously you are concerned that the rules of the House should not change by precedent. You are well aware, Sir, that page 428 of "Erskine May" states:

"Her Majesty cannot be supposed to have a private opinion, apart from that of her responsible advisers; and any attempt to use her name in debate to influence the judgment of Parliament is immediately checked and censured. This rule extends also to other members of the Royal Family."

Mr. Speaker, you will have heard the hon. Member for Dagenham, in his original question to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—probably inadvertently and he would probably like to put it right in the circumstances—state that the Prince of Wales had a point of view which was in conflict with that of the Government. In other words, he was ascribing to the Prince of Wales a private point of view. Further, he was bringing that private point of view or supposed private point of view forward in order to influence debate. I feel that the hon. Member for Dagenham will realise that what he has done is inappropriate, and he may wish to put the record straight.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gould: On that matter—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow me to rule. I can answer the points made by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow). It is not in order to use alleged private opinions of members of the royal family to influence a debate. However, where a member of the royal family has expressed opinions publicly on a matter, it is in order to refer to those opinions without, of course, reflecting adversely on the member of the royal family concerned. Nothing out of order has occurred today.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Further to the former point of order, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Government have abolished the metropolitan counties and the Greater London Council and are now taking more powers away from local democracy, is there not yet more reason to support and defend the parliamentary accountability of the Prime Minister and other Ministers who give press conferences in preference to coming to the House to explain their positions?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for who makes statements from the Front Bench.

Customs and Excise (South Armagh)

4.57 pm

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the complete withdrawal of all British customs and excise services in South Armagh on Saturday 5 March 1988."

The matter is specific because it refers to the complete shutdown of Newry customs clearance station and the 10 customs clearance agencies that operate there. It is important because the Newry customs station is by far the largest and most important customs post on the frontier with the Irish Republic and is responsible for processing the bulk of legitimate trade between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and for controlling other movements across the border, and for reducing the massive swindles involving smuggling and other EEC procedures. The Newry customs station is normally open every Saturday until 5.30 pm.

The matter is urgent because the withdrawal of customs service occurred as a result of a single telephone call, allegedly from a terrorist or terrorist sympathiser. That telephone call did not contain any identifying code and was not accompanied by any public threat from the IRA, yet it resulted in not one member of the customs service turning up for work last Saturday, the day on which two terrorists were buried who had blown themselves up with their own bomb.

Within the next few days, the bodies of three more terrorists will return to Northern Ireland for burial. Will a number of telephone calls be allowed to bring chaos to Northern Ireland again, or will the Government take a stand against such intimidation? That matter requires to be debated urgently in the Chamber today.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of considering a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the complete withdrawal of all British customs and excise services in South Armagh on Saturday 5 March."

I have listened with care and concern to what the hon. Gentleman said. He knows that in Standing Order No. 20 applications I have to decide whether to give the matter precedence over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20, and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.