

CONFIDENTIAL



CB
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Prime Minister

at flap
COMMUNITY CHARGE: POSSIBLE EXEMPTION FOR THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

1. My letter of 7 November to the Lord President raised the question of the possible exemption of the mentally handicapped from liability to the community charge. In his letter of 11 November, the Secretary of State for Social Services expressed sympathy with the proposal but raised doubts about the definitions involved and the degree to which this exemption might set a precedent.

2. The mentally handicapped are a particularly vulnerable and dependent sector of society who, almost by definition, will have little or no perception of the principle of accountability. As I said in my letter of 7 November, I would find it difficult to sustain any considered argument that they should be made liable to the community charge. I think that it could gain us considerable credit if we incorporated an exemption for them in my Bill on introduction, rather than setting out initially to defend the inclusion in liability on arguments which will inevitably be weak, and with the strong probability that political pressure will eventually force us to concede.

3. I do not underestimate the difficulties of definition of the mentally handicapped. For that reason I propose that the provision to be included in my Bill should state only the broad principle of exemption for them, with the detailed definition of those to be exempted left for subordinate legislation.

4. I recognise that singling out one group for special treatment might arguably increase pressures from other disadvantaged groups. But these pressures will materialise anyway, and failure to acknowledge the position of the mentally handicapped will do nothing to head them off.

5. I therefore wish to reiterate my proposal that the mentally handicapped should be exempted from the personal community charge.

6. I am copying this minute to the Lord President, Members of E(LF) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

MR

MALCOLM RIFKIND

19 November 1986

HMP32215

Local Gov't Rating reevaluation PT 5

