


PRIME MINISTER

COMMUNITY CHARGE DEBATE

Chris Patten did well this afternoon. Apart from one slightly sticky moment in the middle of his response to Jack Cunningham, when he got a little bit lost in technical detail, his response to the debate was a good mixture of vigorous opposition-bashing with some judicious, soothing words for the back benches. He reminded Cunningham that Mr. Kinnock has publicly pulled back Labour's alternative so that it could be 'sophisticated' (a novel verb!) and invited him to bring it back once it had been.

Chris Patten also managed to get across, fairly clearly I thought, that the current revenue equalisation system amounted to a massive cross-subsidy to mainly Labour authorities; and that the safety net was a way of phasing this out. He said that he had listened very carefully to all the points made to Nick Ridley last week, both from those who wanted to get the full benefit by having it phased out sooner, and those who would be losers under the new system and therefore wanted a longer transitional period. This brought some warm support from the back-benches. Mark will no doubt give you some more reaction from the Commons tea-room.


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