

Subject



10 DOWNING STREET

10 87A  
Cc Master

From the Private Secretary

21 March, 1985

Dear Mr,

The Prime Minister, together with your Secretary of State and Mr. Baker, met Sir Philip Goodhart today to discuss his proposals for a Parliamentary forum for London.

Sir Philip explained that, since earlier discussions on his proposal for a London grand committee, he had further refined his ideas. What he now proposed was a London select committee which would examine those matters transferred to Ministers by the abolition legislation. Of these, the most important were traffic and public transport. That select committee would report to a London-wide grand committee. He saw such an arrangement as enabling Parliament to discuss London issues without taking up time on the floor of the House, which was all the more important given continuing pressure on the Parliamentary timetable. A select committee would be less inclined to become a talking shop than the proposal he had made originally and would be much more easily defended as a special arrangement for London. The Prime Minister said that she remained unconvinced that there was any need for a London committee of any kind. The proper forum for the discussion of issues affecting London was Parliament itself, both because it was the capital city and because London issues inevitably affected other parts of the country. There were ample Parliamentary opportunities for the discussion of London issues and, indeed, this already happened. Moreover, a London select committee could, like other select committees, turn into a vehicle for attacking the Government. The decision on whether to establish a committee or committees of the kind envisaged by Sir Philip was, of course, for the House itself.

The Prime Minister suggested, nevertheless, that Sir Philip might like to consider the question of whether any proposed committee should be limited to London members covering areas around London whose constituencies were also affected by issues such as transport and traffic. Such an arrangement would, of course, also affect the political balance of the committee. In this context Sir Philip might also like to consider whether his proposal might be expanded to take in members of the House of Lords in a joint select committee. The Government would, from its point of view, consider any fresh ideas Sir Philip might like to put

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forward on this matter, although there could be no guarantee of the outcome of consideration.

I am copying this to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and David Beamish (Lords Whips' Office).

*Very sincerely*  
*T. F.*

TIMOTHY FLESHER

Alan Davis, Esq.,  
Department of the Environment

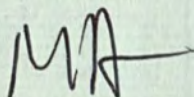
B/F 20/3

Andrew Turnbull

The attached correspondence from Philip Goodhart is self-explanatory.

I imagine that you will want to be at the meeting, and would be very grateful if you could arrange for the necessary briefing for the Prime Minister.

Many thanks.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'M' and 'A' joined together, with a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the 'A'.

MICHAEL ALISON  
4.3.85



10 DOWNING STREET

4th March 1985

Dear Philip

Thank you for your recent letter to me, and for your letter of 15th February to the Prime Minister, with which you enclosed copies of the letter you wrote to Kenneth Baker on 14th February.

In your letter to me, you asked if you could come to see the Prime Minister to discuss the possibility of a "London Grand Committee". She would, of course, be happy to see you, and I am writing to ask if 3.45 p.m. on Thursday, 21st March would be a convenient time for you to come to see her in her room at the House of Commons. Perhaps your secretary could very kindly telephone mine (930-4433) to let us know?

Yours ever  
Michael

MICHAEL ALISON

Sir Philip Goodhart MP

21st March

345 HOC

Prime Minister

Philip Goodhart has written the attached letter to you which has simply been acknowledged. In a separate note to me, he asks if he could come to see you to discuss the possibility of a "London Grand Committee".

Would you agree if I were to fix a time one day after Questions when he might come to see you?

MA

Yes

MICHAEL ALISON

26.2.85

SIR PHILIP GOODHART, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

February 15th 1985

The Prime Minister,

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, MP.

R16

*Dear Prime Minister*

You will recall that last summer I pressed the suggestion that after the abolition of the G.L.C., a London Grand Committee, consisting of all London's Members of Parliament, should be set up to provide a forum where London-wide issues could be discussed. Both Patrick Jenkin and John Biffen saw some merit in this proposal, but you said that we ought to postpone a decision on this point.

Now that the Local Government Bill is about to leave the House of Commons for the House of Lords, I think that Members have to be given some idea of how we are going to resolve this problem. I enclose a copy of a letter to Kenneth Baker, which approaches the London Grand Committee question from a slightly different angle.

*Yours Ever*

*Philip*



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt.Hon.Kenneth Baker MP  
Minister of State,  
Department of Environment.

14th February 1985

I am sorry that my badly broken leg kept me away from the Guillotine Debate on the Local Government Bill, but if I had spoken, I would have said that the Government should tell the House of Commons how London-wide issues are going to be discussed, before the Bill is sent to the House of Lords. If you remain silent on this point, you make it rather more likely that the House of Lords will devise an unwelcome solution of their own.

I think we have five possible courses of action:

- 1) The Government could adopt the proposals for a directly elected London-Wide Body put forward by Alan Greengross, the Chairman of the Conservative Group at the G.L.C. This proposal is clearly supported by a majority of the Conservative members of the G.L.C., and by a number of our colleagues in the House. Despite the fact that the L.W.B. would have substantial executive powers, it could be argued that the establishment of the L.W.B. was compatible with the Government's pledge in the last Manifesto. On the other hand, it would be wholly incompatible with every speech that Environment Ministers have made about London since the General Election. If we now accept the L.W.B., I am sure that Alan Greengross and his colleagues will do their best to save the Government's face; - others would not be so kind.
- 2) The Government could acquiesce in the setting up of a watered down version of the L.W.B. proposals. This Body, (whether directly elected or not) could be presented as a mere extension of the Residuary Body which will be set up by Part VII of the Bill. An enhanced Residuary Body would not, of course, have access to Ministers, and if it is not to be directly elected there isn't any very obvious method of choosing the members.
- 3) The Government could give the London Boroughs Association a more important role than is presently envisaged. Some enhancement of the role of the L.B.A. may be desirable, but the recent Paper by Cyril Taylor has underlined the fact that this presents particular problems for any Conservative Government. Small, predominantly Labour, Inner London Boroughs, are over-represented on the L.B.A. Large, predominantly Conservative, Suburban London Boroughs, are under-represented.

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4) If the Government rejects these three Local Government level options, you could claim that the problem doesn't exist, and you could make no further arrangements for the discussion of London-wide issues by any particular Body. I do not think that this would be a very satisfactory option for London's Members of Parliament. As you said, when winding up the Second Reading of the Local Government Bill: "There is general dissatisfaction over the way in which London matters are being debated in the House." At the same time, Annex 'A' of Alan Greengross's Paper, 'London After Abolition', lists the "enormous enhancement" of Ministerial power which will take place when this Bill reaches the Statute Book, and which will, as he puts it, be "far too often exercised without any form of Parliamentary scrutiny."

Of course the House of Commons will be forced to fill that gap, and the growth of Ministerial responsibilities - both direct and indirect - must mean that Members of Parliament will be asking more Questions, seeking more Debates, and discussing more Orders. The Times recently argued that "problems of grass, traffic lights and refuse" in London would "clog the arteries of the nation's government." I don't accept that argument, but I do fear that the problems of London's grass, London's traffic lights and London's refuse are going to clog the arteries of the House of Commons. Whether we like it or not, London's Members of Parliament are going to have to take a greater interest in London's traffic, London's public transport, London's rates, and a wide range of other issues which we have not so far normally discussed. If we try to do this without modifying our unsatisfactory Parliamentary procedures, we shall get in a mess.

5) As you will be only too well aware, I believe that the best alternative is to set up a London Grand Committee, open to all Members of Parliament in the London area. We could then, in an orderly and sensible fashion, be able to monitor, scrutinise and debate, the activities of Ministers with respect to London. The Government's proposals for various Joint Boards and the alternative methods of dealing with other common problems are perfectly defensible, but it would be absurd to think that there won't be teething problems. I think it makes more sense to have a special Grand Committee, where these things can be discussed rationally, rather than having constant arguments about how and when these matters can be debated on the Floor of the House.

As you said when winding up the Second Reading Debate: "The idea of the Committee stands apart from this legislation", and I don't believe that there is much point in putting down a London Grand Committee Amendment in the hope of getting a brief Debate for the Report Stage.

I think, however, that it is important that the Government should give a clear indication of how London-wide issues are to be debated, before we send this Bill to the House of Lords. The London Grand Committee is still our best bet.