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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 March, 1985

The Prime Minister, together with your Secretary of State and Mr. Baker, met Councillor Alan Greengross today to discuss his proposals for a successor authority to the GLC.

Councillor Greengross said that he completely accepted the Government's position that the GLC should be abolished and that there should be no successor authority of the same kind. He remained of the view, however, that the Government could win the argument more effectively if it conceded the case for an authority which could represent London as a whole. Such an authority would be responsible to the Secretary of State and would act on his behalf to co-ordinate the finances of the boroughs and ensure that the services devolved to the boroughs were delivered. The membership of an authority of this kind - whether elected or appointed - was less important than their function. He would prefer an elected authority but could see that Ministers would prefer either nomination or appointment by the Secretary of State. Failure to adopt some structure of this kind would risk the ILEA taking over a representative role as the voice of London and would lose the important job of co-ordination, without which some of the savings envisaged by Ministers could not be made.

The Prime Minister said that she remained completely unconvinced by the argument that there should be a voice for London of the kind envisaged by Councillor Greengross. There was no real demand for such an authority and there was no way of establishing one in such a way that it did not become the GLC all over again. The point of GLC abolition was to devolve powers to the boroughs: that was what they wanted. In so far as there was a need for a voice for London, it would be provided by Westminster or the City. There was, however, no sense of identity between boroughs as dissipated as Finchley and Lambeth. Mr. Jenkin and Mr. Baker continued on this theme after the Prime Minister's departure from the meeting. They pointed out, in particular, that an elected authority could not be responsible to Ministers in the way envisaged by Councillor Greengross and an appointed authority would not be accepted either by Labour boroughs or Conservative boroughs as representative. It would be entirely contrary to the principle of abolition merely to re-create a

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London-wide elected authority which would inevitably lead to the same problems which required abolition in the first place. Councillor Greengross' objectives of support for the Government's position and an elected authority were mutually incompatible. At this point the meeting broke up when your Secretary of State had to leave.

I am sending a copy of this to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), David Morris (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Richard Broadbent (Chief Secretary's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

TIMOTHY FLESHER

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