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cc MASTER

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

26 March, 1985.

Dear Alan,

The Prime Minister held a meeting today to discuss the handling of the Local Government Bill. Your Secretary of State, the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chief Secretary, the Chief Whip (Commons), the Chief Whip (Lords), the Minister for Local Government, Mr. Brearley and Mr. Letwin were present.

The Prime Minister said that proposals had arisen from those on the Government side in the House of Commons and House of Lords which would re-institute some form of body to represent London as a whole or to discuss London wide issues. The first of these which had been put forward notably by Councillor Alan Greengross for an elected authority in London - the so-called "Voice for London" - was in her view totally unacceptable. The rationale for the abolition of the GLC was that London was not an entity in the same way as other cities. On the one hand, it was the capital of the country whose affairs ought to be discussed in Parliament. On the other hand, it was a series of communities, often with little in common with each other, whose government was best left in the hands of the boroughs. All proposals for an elected authority for London for the post-abolition period should be resisted. The Secretary of State for the Environment confirmed that it remained the Government's position that there should be no elected body; no executive body; and no precepting body.

On the question of the handling of the Bill in the Lords, the Lord President of the Council said that it was important to secure a good majority on the report stage in the Commons against the "Voice for London": Ministers presenting the Government's case should refer to the explicit commitments in the Conservative Manifesto at the last election not only for the abolition of the GLC but also for devolution of powers to boroughs. When the Bill reached the Lords, it was important not only to convince the advocates of the "Voice for London" that there would be no concession by the Government, but also to convince sufficient cross-benchers. Together with Environment Ministers he would consider how best an approach to

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cross-benchers might be made. The task would be an extremely difficult one, partly because the Government's critics of this issue mostly had experience of local government and were able to draw on that experience in the case they made. Nevertheless, the Government could and should win the issue on the merits of its own case. The Prime Minister stressed the importance of defeating all proposals of the kind put forward by Councillor Greengross, both in terms of the passage of the Local Government Bill, and in terms of the standing of the Government.

The Prime Minister said that the second proposal for a London wide body was for a Select Committee, as suggested by Sir Philip Goodhart. She was not attracted by this proposal any more than by the "Voice for London". Moreover, as the Lord Privy Seal pointed out, a Select Committee on London would run counter to the whole basis of Departmental Select Committees which had become established. The question of a Select Committee was not, however, one for the Government, but instead for the House to decide. If the issue came up on the report stage of the Bill, Ministers should point out that the decision was not one for them, but that a Select Committee of the kind proposed would be entirely contrary to the principles on which the Select Committee system had run for many years. It was further pointed out that a Select Committee of the House of Commons would not help to sell the abolition Bill in the House of Lords. That would require a Joint Select Committee, which would raise problems of a different but equally serious kind.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that the Government faced a major task in steering the Abolition Bill through its remaining stages in the Commons and in the Lords. A great deal of lobbying was going on, especially amongst Lords cross-benchers, against the Bill. Environment Ministers, together with the Business Managers in both Houses, should take whatever action they considered necessary to counter such briefing and to secure the passage of the Bill. She herself stood ready to play whatever part was necessary.

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I am sending copies of this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Office of the Lord President), David Morris (Office of the Lord Privy Seal), Richard Broadbent (Office of the Chief Secretary, HM Treasury), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office, House of Commons), David Beamish (Chief Whip's Office, House of Lords), Mike Bailey (Office of the Minister for Local Government), and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours

T. F.

(Timothy Flesher)

Alan Davis, Esq.,
Department of the Environment.

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