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CABINET OFFICE

From the Minister of State

Lord Gowrie

MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL OFFICE

Great George Street

London SW1P 3AL

Telephone 01-233 8610

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP
Lord Privy Seal
68 Whitehall
London SW1

2 July 1984

*John,
Dear Mr Biffen*

*Dr
4/7*

DAVID STEEL'S FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (No 2) BILL (S.O.39)

David Steel is to introduce a Freedom of Information (No 2) Bill under Standing Order 39. The Notice of Presentation reads:

"Freedom of information (No 2): Bill to establish a general right of access to official information for members of the public subject to certain exemptions; to establish the machinery for enabling the right of access to be exercised by members of the public; to make new provision for the protection of official information and articles; and for connected purposes".

David Steel's first Freedom of Information Bill is down for Second Reading on 6 July, when we have agreed it should be blocked (your letter to me of 5 March). It has still not been published.

The Long Titles of the two Bills are identical except for the addition here of "to make new provision for the protection of officials information and articles". My guess is that the Bills are virtually the same, but that the No 2 Bill will contain provisions intended to replace (rather than repeal outright) Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911. But there may of course be other significant differences.

Clearly, however, this is a Bill to establish a statutory right to official information in general, as distinct from the two other Bills promoted by the Freedom of Information Campaign: Simon Hughes' Local Government (Access to Information) and

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Chris Smith's (Access to Personal Files Bill) - on the second of which I have just written to you. As such it is objectionable in principle, for the reasons set out in my letter to you of 24 February.

I am sure we should not allow it to receive a Second Reading. We have agreed to block the first David Steel Bill, and Patrick Jenkin and I have, as you know, recommended that the other two Bills should (though for practical reasons rather than those of principle) be treated similarly.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, other members of Legislation Committee, Sir Robert Armstrong, and First Parliamentary Counsel.

*Yours,
G*

LORD GOWRIE

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10:30 AM

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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2AF

5 July 1984

Dear Gray,

Handwritten initials and scribbles in blue ink.

DAVID STEEL'S FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (NO 2) BILL

Thank you for your letter of ^{att.} 2 July about the Freedom of Information (No 2) Bill introduced by David Steel on Monday.

As you say, the differences between this Bill and David's previous one seem minor, and there is no doubt that it runs contrary to Government policy and must be blocked.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, other members of Legislation Committee, Sir Robert Armstrong and First Parliamentary Counsel.

Handwritten signature of John Biffen.

JOHN BIFFEN

Rt Hon the Earl of Gowrie
Minister of State
Cabinet Office