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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

29 September 1987

Prime Minister 2

DRS  
30/9.

Dear Nicholas

RATES REFORM BILL

Thank you for your letter of 28 September which could not have arrived more opportunely as I have been taking stock of progress with Parliamentary Counsel.

I think it is common ground that the part of the Bill that is giving trouble is the part that deals with the rating system and transitional arrangements on which we were having substantial policy discussions during July. While it is clearly right to look for ways of simplifying second-order points wherever possible, I share your view that this in itself is not likely to change the overall assessment that the Bill will not be ready in November as planned.

I have explored with John Wakeham, David Waddington and First Parliamentary Counsel whether we can bring the Bill's timetable forward by deploying more resources on it should we be able to obtain them. Mr de Waal has advised us, however, that the Bill is so complex and work on it is now so far developed that the insertion of further draftsmen - who would need time to prepare the subject - would be far more likely to hinder the Bill's progress than to speed it. The Counsel handling the Bill has been relieved of all other work and is supported by a strengthened team, including a lawyer from your Department who is familiar with the background. Mr de Waal's clear view is that these arrangements should be left undisturbed.

I would have been prepared to contemplate whatever steps were needed to free extra drafting resources for this Bill if that would have helped. But I think we must accept First Parliamentary Counsel's advice on a matter of this kind.

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP

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John Wakeham, David Waddington and I have considered the implications for the programme as a whole of a delay into December on this Bill. Our conclusion is that provided we can introduce the other main Bills as planned, and the present news on these is more reassuring, we can accommodate some limited slippage on the Rates Bill. Naturally, the earlier in December that the Bill can be introduced the less our problems will be; we shall clearly need to keep a very close eye on its progress.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chief Whip, First Parliamentary Counsel and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours truly

W. H. H. W. H. H.

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