



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

2 November 1987

Dear Robin,

RATE REFORMS: REGIONAL VISITS

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 30 October about the efforts being made to explain the Government's rate reform proposals to the country. The Prime Minister commented that the results being achieved are excellent and she has warmly commended the efforts of everyone concerned.

I am copying this letter to Mike Eland (Lord President's Office), David Crawley (Scottish Office), Jon Shortridge (Welsh Office) and Shirley Oxenbury (Chairman's Office).

Yours,

David

David Norgrove

Robin Young Esq
Department of the Environment

00

CBG



Prime Minister²

You will want to commend this effort?

Prime Minister

Yes

RATE REFORMS: REGIONAL VISITS

L. excellent - very good results. 30/10.

Michael Howard and Christopher Chope have recently completed an extensive series of regional visits to explain our rate reform proposals to local business representatives, Party members and local media across England. I thought you would want to know of the response they met.

The tour was most valuable. We made significant progress in explaining the reasons for and mechanics of our proposals, and we identified areas of concern which will help us as the Bill goes forward. We produced a new booklet and accompanying video explaining the three part package of reforms which received good exposure.

The contrast between positive regional press coverage during the tour and more critical articles before and since highlights the importance of local, vocal support for the proposals. Michael is writing to Ministerial and back bench colleagues this week to encourage them in this, and to provide details on the effects of the proposals in their constituencies.

Coverage

Michael and Christopher met council leaders and officers from 20 local authorities and held 11 press conferences across the country. The video was shown to 11 meetings of local businessmen, from CBI branches and local Chambers of Commerce, and at lunches or dinners with the producers, editors or senior journalists of 80 key regional newspapers and radio and TV stations. We covered virtually the whole of England at 30 Party meetings inviting councillors from 381 of the 403 local authorities and addressing audiences totalling some 1600 Party members.



Some 7000 copies of the booklet have been sent out. We have had 40 further requests for the video, which is available on free loan. We also provided factsheets for the press on details of the package.

The tour received good coverage in the national and regional press and significant interest from national as well as local television and radio. We trailed it successfully in August to meet supporters' fears that the case was being lost by default. The Today Programme carried a good contribution from the first meeting with London businessmen, and the tour was also covered by the World at One, the World Tonight, Channel 4 News and This Week Next Week. We contributed to full programmes on the rate reforms proposals by Weekend World and Panorama. Michael appeared on Newsnight on the eve of Party Conference. The tour was seen nationally as a necessary promotion of a radical new policy.

Key Messages

The Party was in general strongly supportive, although there were inevitably some critics, particularly over the plans for transition to the community charge. Business was on the whole supportive, especially as regards the need to move away from the present system. But the CBI are in a muddle as to their public stance. Local authorities were particularly concerned about the workability of the proposals.

As well as the reactions of immediate self-interest, especially from businesses in the south, there were 4 main areas of criticism to which we propose to give particular attention:

- doubts about the practicality of the community charge proposals, relating to cost and enforcement;
- complaints about their unfairness, with doubts that there would be a real improvement in accountability;



- a widespread view amongst businesses that abolishing a local charge will damage their chance of receiving fair return for their rates;
- strong pressure for no phasing-in of the community charge.

Summary

The emphasis of national and local coverage has now shifted, as we intended, from the need for change to the details of the proposals. We have obtained useful insights into key pressure points, which will inform development of the policy and its presentation over the coming months. For instance, we are looking into the possibilities for providing statutory consultation with local businesses on levels of local services, and as you know we are discussing the proposals for transition to the community charge.

The work that went into this tour Departmentally and on the Party net was well worthwhile. The new information material received wide distribution, and we benefited from being seen and heard.

In addition, we have stimulated interest amongst editors in Ministerial articles and follow-up answers to key questions. We plan a major distribution of such articles to regional press, freesheets and business magazines when the Bill has been published. We have a series of speech opportunities over the next two months, and we will be helping colleagues to give informed support to the proposals both nationally and locally.

I am copying this for information to the Lord President, the Chairman of the Party and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

N R

30 October 1987



... a widespread view amongst business that the ...
 local ... will ... their ... of the ...
 ... for ...

Summary

The ... of ... and ...
 We ... from the ... of the
 ... We have obtained ...
 ... which ...
 ... and the ...
 ... and the ...
 ... into the ...
 ... and ...
 ... are ...

The work that ...
 ...
 ...

In ...
 ...
 ...
 ...
 ...
 ...

I ...
 ...
 ...