

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister ①

PRIME MINISTER

Shouldn't we revive the

FUTURE OF THE ILEA

secession decision rather than

Concern is growing - particularly among London Tory MPs - that, after the abolition of the GLC, ILEA will continue, unrestrained, to destroy education in inner London.

(i) - yip in Mr Letwin's note? Should

Earlier DES plans envisaged government control over excessive expenditure in ILEA but offered the London boroughs no prospect of being able to influence ILEA's educational policies.

I write a

secret or personal

I attach a paper by Oliver Letwin with some appealing ideas for constraining capricious and far-left behaviour by the socialist majority.

note to

Sir K

Joseph's

private

Keith is attracted by these ideas and his officials too have sympathy with some of them. He is asking MISC 95 for leave to include in his White Paper some such proposals for consultation.

If you think these ideas are worth making as firm as possible, we let the DES know of your interest?

secretary reminding

him of that

decision?

MLL 19/7

but this is inconsistent with

see my meeting note, at flag A

what you agreed at your meeting with Sir K Joseph and London

Members: which was that, after the

Election there would be consultation with the Joint Board and the Boroughs

about the future of the Board; and that

at that stage the Board or some of its

CONFIDENTIAL members would want Boroughs to be

able to secede.

FERDINAND MOUNT
19 July 1983

fm

19 July 1983

FUTURE OF THE ILEA

On Wednesday 20 July, MISC 95 will be considering the financing of the new Joint Boards. One of the most important of these Boards is the replacement for the ILEA. The establishment of this Board poses special problems which deserve special attention.

The ILEA dwarfs all other London services: its planned expenditure for 1983/84 is £869 m, compared with c.£120 m for the fire service. The ILEA is also woefully extravagant: expenditure per pupil is c.40% higher than the national average. In addition to its profligacy, its educational policies have been disastrous; its examination record has been amongst the very worst, even when allowances are made for the home background of the children, the number of immigrants etc. Moreover, it has made every effort to bring political bias into the classroom, and has frequently succeeded in so doing. These deficiencies are widely known, and widely deplored. It is consequently not only right but also politically important that the new Joint Board should offer hope of distinct improvement.

The Government's resolve to impose direct controls on expenditure will help solve the problem of financial extravagance, but will do little or nothing to improve the Board's educational and "ideological" policies. Nor will the financial controls be sufficient to ensure a rapid reduction in the bureaucracy; an obstructive Board might well choose to make the children rather than the hierarchs suffer. We must therefore ensure that constraints on financial, administrative and educational irresponsibility are built into the constitution of the Board itself.

The proposals at present being discussed are not likely to achieve this desirable result. For many years, the representatives of the Boroughs have been amongst the most irresponsible members of the ILEA; many of them have acted virtually as independent agents, and have not - in any practical sense - been held accountable to their home-Councils or to the electorates of their Boroughs. Indeed, some of the "representatives" have never formally reported to their Councils and have failed to take an interest in complaints made by parents living outside their own ward. There is no reason

to suppose that this situation would be changed by the establishment of a Joint Board on the lines proposed: it is altogether probable that the Board would levy its precept with an ILEA-like disregard for the financial and educational interests of the electorate, and that the "representatives" would remain aloof, unresponsive and unaccountable.

The situation could be improved by opening the workings of the Board to greater public scrutiny and by giving the Borough Councils the power and the duty to exercise real control - both educational and financial - over the Board. The means of achieving this need to be studied in detail by officials. But, as a start, it would be worth considering:

(i) whether two-thirds of the Boroughs should have to approve the Board's budget, in full Council, before the Board could proceed with its expenditure;

(ii) whether the Secretary of State/^{for Education} should be given the power to arbitrate between the Board and the Boroughs in the case of a dispute about the budget;

(iii) whether any major policy changes proposed by the Board should have to be approved by two-thirds of the Councils of the Boroughs; (the definition of "major changes" could be laid down in regulations, and made the subject of appeal to the Secretary of State for Education);

(iv) whether the representatives on the Boroughs should have to report frequently (eg quarterly), in writing, to their Councils;

→ (v) whether the representatives of a Borough should be subject to periodic re-election by the Council;

(vi) whether every Borough Councillor should have the right to demand sight of any of the Board's papers, including especially those concerned with education in his Borough; (Councillors are often at present unable to obtain such information);

(vii) whether the representative of a Borough should have the duty to appear in person, and hear complaints, at any meeting called by a specified number of parents in the Borough; (this would be in line with our general attempt to increase the scope for parental influence).

If these measures are not thought suitable, others should be devised. Some form of internal constitutional restraint is urgently needed if we are to allay the considerable and justified anxieties felt both by Conservatives on the ILEA and by many home counties backbenchers.

o.

OLIVER LETWIN

1 : A

NOTE FOR THE FILE (not for circulation)

cc. Mr. Butler
Mr. Mount

FUTURE OF THE INNER LONDON EDUCATION AUTHORITY

At a meeting this afternoon with a number of London Members of Parliament, the Prime Minister decided that there should be no commitment to the abolition of the ILEA before the General Election. We should, at a (late) suitable moment announce the break up of the GLC, and that as a consequence of this the ILEA would be replaced by a Joint Committee of elected representatives from the Boroughs, without the 17 co-opted members. After the Election, there would be consultation with this Joint Committee and with the Boroughs about the future of the Committee. It might be at that stage that the Committee, or some of its members, would request that ^{Boroughs} ~~they~~ be permitted to opt out from the Committee. Thus the ILEA would be abolished, but the decision would be taken in stages.

Sir Keith Joseph was invited to revise his Cabinet paper, as necessary, to clear it with No. 10, and to recirculate it for discussion, probably within the next month.

It was agreed that the conclusion about the abolition of the ILEA and the requirement to consult with the Joint Committee about this, should not appear in Sir Keith's paper; and that nothing should be said about it before the General Election, whenever that would be.

Mcs

14 April 1983