

Letter from
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HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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10 March, 1986.

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Rt.Hon. Kenneth Baker, PC, MP,
Secretary of State for the Environment,
2 Marsham Street,
London S.W.1.

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Dear Kenneth,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL

Many of us who worked on this Bill through Committee are deeply concerned about the fundamental changes which have been made by the Lords.

As you will know, we argued in Committee that the Bill was not strong enough and contained a number of loopholes - arguments echoed by many Conservative peers. Indeed, a number of crossbenchers, including Lords Chalfont and Denning expressed criticism of the Bill's provisions.

The Bill has now been thoroughly emasculated by the Lords' Opposition amendments. Not only is the Code of Conduct to have no force whatsoever, but the principle clause, which defines the publicity to be prohibited, has been so circumscribed as to negate the Bill's purpose. Under the amended clause it is NOT unlawful for a council to publish party political propaganda, if it can satisfy a judge that it was not designed as such. The effect of the publicity in changing the way the electorate actually votes is not to be considered.

We do not need to recite in detail the unscrupulous devices by which left-wing councillors attack our party and promote their own policies using public money and facilities. Suffice it to say that their activities are on a massive scale running into millions of pounds. In particular, they are able to pay for the services of thousands of political activists - something the Conservative (and Labour) Party machine can never hope to match.

We cannot stress too strongly our belief - and we are members who have first-hand experience of the way in which the new left operate - that if the Bill goes forward in its present state it will mean the death knell for Conservative politics in every industrial centre. Moreover, almost every Conservative shire stronghold contains within its boundaries an industrial town which has fallen, or is liable to fall, prey to the socialists. These towns are the springboards from which, if unchecked by your Bill, they will launch their attack on the Conservative heartland.

Having expressed our reservations about the original Bill's effectiveness, it is inconceivable to us that the Government could allow their Bill to pass into law only as a mere shadow of the Bill which Ministers commended to Parliament.

We ask you as a matter of urgency to announce that you intend to restore the Bill to the form approved by the Commons (subject to a minimal concession promised to parish councils) either at Lords' Report or CCLA. It is something for which we shall be campaigning actively.

Yours ever,

Edward Leigh

Aeran Bowden.

Michael Forsyth

Chris G.

Alan Morahan

Robert Fore

