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Correspondence from Dr. Hammer: Sept 80

PRIME MINISTER

cc. Mr. Ingham  
Mr. Wolfson

The Leicester Codex

As you know, the case for overturning the Reviewing Committee's recommendation is powerful.

But regardless of the grounds for overturning it, any such decision is almost certain to be damaging both to you and Dr. Hammer, because:

- (i) Dr. Hammer is well known to be a friend of yours with ready access;
- (ii) Publicity about Gordon Reece's departure from your service to his has hardly died down;
- (iii) Hammer's very presence in London next week is for his Daumier exhibition, which has benefited from Royal patronage;
- (iv) This would be the first time that an Arts Minister had overturned a reviewing committee's recommendation.

The alternative is this: when you see Dr. Hammer on Thursday, you explain that, in any other circumstances, you would have supported your Arts Minister's decision to overturn. However in this case you feel that you must protect him, and the reputation of the office of Prime Minister, from innuendo that would be unfair but nevertheless easy to make.

/ It is,

It is, unfortunately, a price that your friends sometimes have to pay. You are entirely confident that no national collection will have any prospect of raising funds for the Codex, even if they were inclined to try. It has already been more effectively displayed in three months of his ownership than in all its earlier years in this country.

Dr. Hammer should find it very difficult to resist this, especially considering his continuing interest in North Sea oil licences. He was, in any case, intending to exhibit the manuscript here again in the early summer, so that it should make very little difference to his plans. It will avoid much in the way of an unjustified smear campaign.

I understand that Mr. Channon now takes the view that it would be desirable to tackle the issue in this way.

Agree?

M. A. PATTISON

30 January 1981

FROM THE MINISTER FOR THE ARTS

PRIME MINISTER

You will remember that Dr Hammer was given permission temporarily to export the Leicester Codex to Washington for the Inauguration ceremonies. It is now back and the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art met yesterday to consider his application for an export licence for the longer term.

As you know, Dr Hammer has agreed to exhibit the manuscript in this country for three months every year until ten years after his death. He has asked his Foundation to bear in mind his wish for it subsequently to be shown in the UK at regular intervals.

But, as I feared, the Reviewing Committee have recommended to me that an export licence should be withheld for a period of three months to give a public collection the chance of raising the necessary £2.4m to buy it.

If I accept the recommendation or accept it but reduce the stop period to, say, one month, Dr Hammer who may well regard our treatment of his generous offer as mean spirited, may withdraw it. In that event the country may in the long term lose the opportunity of seeing the manuscript. If, however, I agree that a licence should be granted, this will mean overturning a recommendation by the Committee for the first time since it was established in 1952.

Dr Hammer is coming to London on 3 February and is seeing you on 5th. We shall need to decide what to do by then. My officials have taken soundings and I understand and would be able to say, that in fact there is no real prospect of any public institution launching an appeal to save the manuscript. Lord Charteris, Chairman of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, has already said privately that he has no intention of stepping in. There is one other complication. The Committee have expressed concern that the manuscript might be damaged by excessive travel. I am quite certain that Dr Hammer has already taken this point into account.

I judge that a decision to grant a licence, although likely to attract some publicity, will not cause too much trouble. Subject to your views, therefore, I would propose contrary to the Committee's recommendation, to agree to a licence being granted - and to announce the decision on February 3rd.

P.C.

PAUL CHANNON