

Ref. A01802

MR. WHITMORE

*Agreed  
not*

Prime Minister

*I am sure that it is right to be forthcoming with the Select Committee on this issue. If you agree, are you content to proceed on the lines suggested in paragraph 4?*

Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service

*AM  
27 iii*

I have learned that the House of Commons Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service wishes to enquire about the relationship between the Cabinet Office and the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD). There is no suggestion at the moment of the Committee calling an official of the Cabinet Office to give evidence on ACARD. One of the Committee's clerks wishes to speak to the official "responsible for ACARD" to establish a number of basic facts about how ACARD works and its relationship with the Cabinet Office.

2. As you will see from the attached Hansard extract, when the Select Committees were appointed the Cabinet Office was not specified as one of the Government Departments with which the Treasury and Civil Service Committee are concerned. But we believe that the Committee does not regard itself as debarred in principle from enquiring into aspects of the Cabinet Office, as being, together with the Treasury and the Civil Service Department, within the Prime Minister's Ministerial responsibility; and we have not sought to prevent earlier Select Committees from taking evidence from those parts of the Cabinet Office - like the CPRS and the Central Statistical Office - which have a policy advisory function (as opposed to the Secretariat).

3. I believe that we should need to challenge the Committee, if it sought to enquire into the working of the Cabinet Committee system or of the Secretariat in serving that system. But I think that it would be difficult, and unwise, to challenge its right to enquire about ACARD, or about the Cabinet Office's relationship to it. To do so would probably only create the impression that the Cabinet Office and ACARD have something to hide, which they do not. It may well be that once the Committee have received a general, oral explanation of ACARD's relationship with the Cabinet Office, the low level of public expenditure involved (£43,000 in 1979) and the Council's membership, the Committee will not



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wish to pursue the subject any further. If, on the other hand, they decided to enquire into the work of ACARD, it would probably be appropriate for the Chairman, Dr. Spinks, to give evidence; he might be supported by the Secretary (a Cabinet Office official).

4. Provided that the Prime Minister agrees, I will arrange for the Committee's Clerk to be given the name of the Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office responsible for ACARD. In answering questions about ACARD, he will not enter into a discussion of the machinery or procedure for implementing the recommendations in ACARD reports nor will he reveal the existence of a Cabinet Office Committee on ACARD. He will confine himself to the information on ACARD which is generally available, namely the advisory nature of their reports, the Council's membership, and the fact that its members are appointed by the Prime Minister, and the fact that the Cabinet Office's role is confined to providing the Secretariat and supporting services.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

26th March, 1980

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### SELECT COMMITTEES

**Mr. Speaker:** Before I call upon the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster it may be convenient if I explain to the House the course that we should follow, in view of the business motion to which the House has just agreed. During the course of the debate it will be open to any hon. Member to discuss the various amendments that stand on the Paper and I think it will be to the advantage of the House if all the amendments are taken under general discussion during the debate.

When the debate comes to a conclusion I shall call on hon. Members in succession to move formally the first of each group of amendments shown on the selection list that has been published. When the last of these amendments has been

disposed of I shall put the main Question, or the main Question, as amended. I shall then call on the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to move, successively, the two other motions relating to the Expenditure Committee and nomination of Select Committees, and the amendment to the latter will be dealt with in the same way.

In any of the amendments that I have selected for Division is agreed to I shall call the Member concerned to move the necessary consequential amendments within the group in the order in which they appear on the Paper.

3.45 p.m.

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas):** I beg to move,

That—

(1) Select committees shall be appointed to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the principal government departments set out in paragraph (2) of this Order and associated public bodies, and similar matters within the responsibilities of the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

(2) The committees appointed under paragraph 1 of this Order, the principal departments of Government with which they are concerned, the maximum numbers of each committee and the quorum in each case shall be as follows:

Name of committee	Principal government departments concerned	Maximum numbers of Members	Quorum
1. Agriculture ...	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.	9	3
2. Defence ...	Ministry of Defence ...	10	3
3. Education, Science and Arts.	Department of Education and Science	9	3
4. Employment ...	Department of Employment ...	9	3
5. Energy ...	Department of Energy ...	10	3
6. Environment ...	Department of the Environment ...	10	3
7. Foreign Affairs ...	Foreign and Commonwealth Office ...	11	3
8. Home Affairs ...	Home Office ...	11	3
9. Industry and Trade.	Department of Industry, Department of Trade.	11	3
10. Social Services ...	Department of Health and Social Security.	9	3
11. Transport ...	Department of Transport ...	10	3
12. Treasury and Civil Service.	Treasury, Civil Service Department, Board of Inland Revenue, Board of Customs and Excise.	11	3

(3) There shall in addition be a select committee to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and of the Health Services Commissioners for England, Scotland and Wales which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; and the committee shall consist of eight Members, of whom the quorum shall be three.

(4) The Foreign Affairs Committee, the Home Affairs Committee and the Treasury and Civil Service Committee shall each have the power to appoint one sub-committee.

(5) There may be a sub-committee, drawn from the membership of two or more of the Energy, Environment, Industry and Trade, Transport and Treasury and Civil Service Committees, set up from time to time to consider any matter affecting two or more nationalised industries.

(6) Select committees appointed under this Order shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time;

(b) to appoint persons with technical knowledge either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference; and

(c) to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before sub-committees; and the sub-committees appointed under this Order shall have power to send for persons,



papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to adjourn from place to place, and shall have a quorum of three.

- 50 (7) Unless the House otherwise orders, all Members nominated to a committee appointed under this Order shall continue to be members of that committee for the remainder of the Parliament.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.

I start by welcoming the former Home Secretary the right hon. Member for Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) to the Front Bench as Opposition spokesman on procedure. When I was Shadow Leader of the House I had to mark two Ministers and I take it as a compliment that when the shadow has been turned into substance the Opposition need two spokesmen to keep a check on one.

Today is, I believe, a crucial day in the life of the House of Commons. After years of discussion and debate, we are embarking upon a series of changes that could constitute the most important parliamentary reforms of the century. Parliament may not, for the moment, stand at the zenith of public esteem. There are tides of fashion that rise and fall as there are tides of opinion that move. We should not be too concerned about that. One truth abides and that is that parliamentary government has been one of the great contributions of the British nation to the world's civilisation, and we would do well to remember that. Great nations fail only when they cease to comprehend the institutions that they themselves have created.

That is not to say that I believe that Parliament is impeccable. The greatness of Parliament and the reason why it has survived for 700 years is that it has always been ready to reform itself. It has found the will to put matters right when they have gone wrong and to renew itself when it has discerned the signs of the times.

Let me say at the outset that the phrase "parliamentary government" is a misnomer. At no time in its long history, save for a brief and disastrous interlude, has Parliament governed or made any claim to do so. Parliament's function has been a different one. It has been to subject the Executive to limitations and control; to protect the liberties of the individual citizen; to defend him against the arbitrary use of power; to focus the mind of the nation on the great issues of the day by the maintenance of continuous dialogue and discussion; and, by remaining at the centre of

the stage, to impose parliamentary conventions or manners on the whole political system.

I believe that Parliament is successful in the last two aims. It is on the two first ones that public and professional anxiety has focused and constellated. It has been increasingly felt that the twentieth century Parliament is not effectively supervising the Executive, and that while the power and effectiveness of Whitehall has grown that of Westminster has diminished.

The proposals that the Government are placing before the House are intended to redress the balance of power to enable the House of Commons to do more effectively the job it has been elected to do. In doing this the Government are redeeming a pledge in their election manifesto, which was repeated in the Gracious Speech, that the House should have an early opportunity to amend our procedures, particularly as they relate to the scrutiny of government. These proposals are based on the report of a Select Committee on Procedure appointed in 1976 which reported two years later.

It is a thorough, authoritative and lucid report. I pay tribute to all the hon. Members who served on the Procedure Committee and who spent so many hours producing the report. I pay particular tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Warrington (Sir T. Williams) who, as chairman of the Committee presided over it and brought it, by his devotion and diligence, to such a successful conclusion. It is with his name that I trust the report will always be associated.

The report contains 76 recommendations in six main sections. It is clearly impossible to implement them all at once. This is intended as the first instalment of the implementation and I hope that it will answer my hon. Friend the Member for St. Marylebone (Mr. Baker) who broadcast this morning. He did not awaken me, because I am an early riser. He expressed the hope that there would be further commitments from the Government on this matter. We must proceed, however, in an orderly manner, and it