

PRIME MINISTER

1. This is a copy. The original has been extracted and closed, 40 years.

Prorogation

The attached minute from Sir Robert Armstrong (Flag A) raises the question whether, in order to avoid the kind of row we saw in the House last month when Black Rod tried to deliver his summons to the Commons, we should think about abolishing the Prorogation Speech. As you will see from my manuscript note on Sir Robert Armstrong's minute, my first reaction was that such a change of procedure would be something the House would be likely to react against. But I delayed submitting the minute to you while Nick Sanders did some further research.

As Nick has pointed out, Sir Robert Armstrong has run together two separate issues: the need for a Prorogation Speech; and the possibility of taking action to prevent another row with Black Rod and another challenge to the authority of the Chair.

Amend
Nick and I are inclined to believe that it would be unwise to pursue the second of these ideas very far.

Amend.
Passage deleted and closed, 40 years,
under FOI Exemptions.

Wayland
18 October 2011

Moreover, as you will see from the letters from the Speaker to Mr. Alex Lyon at Flags B and C, the Speaker himself has taken a very firm line on this challenge to his authority, and I doubt very much whether he would welcome a change of procedure which some might suggest meant that he was backing down on the issue.

I think that we have to reckon that there may be another attempt to make trouble at the next Prorogation. But what we should not be doing is trying to change the arrangements in order to spare the Speaker difficulty and embarrassment. To do so might just

as easily provide a new challenge to Alex Lyon and his like-minded colleagues.

The other of the two issues - the need for a Prorogation Speech - might be more worth exploring. No one reads the speech; it is not reported; and it takes a lot of people a lot of time and effort to put it together. The cost of the exercise must be several thousand pounds, and the world is little the wiser for it when it has been completed. There is a good case for considering whether we could at least simplify our procedures for dealing with the Prorogation Speech, and preferably do away with it altogether.

Do you agree that we might investigate further the possibility of abolishing the Prorogation Speech, while retaining the present framework of the Prorogation ceremony (including the summons from Black Rod)?

thw.

The matter of the speech is worth
planning (we could have a one-page summary
if anything is needed) but I should not
touch the procedure. It would

24 December, 1980.

only arouse another confrontation
and some of those who caused
trouble last time are only too
anxious to diminish the Prorogation
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