



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

20 February 1980

Dear George.

Thank you so much for your letter of 7 February about the format of Prime Minister's Questions. You passed on the suggestion that the subject for a particular Question could be established by the first supplementary, so as to give a greater sense of coherence to Question Time.

I have given this idea some thought, but on reflection I have concluded that it would probably not be a success in practice. As you said yourself, Members are jealous of their right to put random and unexpected Questions, and I am sure that a sizeable minority would resist any change which restricted that freedom. Furthermore, the proposal would place the Chair in the position of having to determine throughout Questions whether a particular supplementary fell within the area which was defined by the first supplementary or not. This would give scope for procedural dispute and recrimination.

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Although the existing system is far from perfect, it seems to me that we have little alternative but to continue with it. I am sorry that more Members are not taking advantage of the opportunity to put down substantive, rather than open, Questions to me; perhaps we shall see a larger proportion as time goes by, so bringing about the change which has been suggested to you.

I should of course be delighted to consider any other changes in procedure which are proposed directly to you, and I hope that you will not hesitate to pass them on to me. I am most willing to look at any suggestion which has any degree of support in the House.

Yours ever

Raymond

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The Rt. Hon. George Thomas, M.P.