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Parliament

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

25 June 1980

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE:  
OUTSTANDING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had a word this morning about the present position on the outstanding recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure.

The Chancellor said that he had now consulted the various elements in the House, including Mr. Edward du Cann and representatives of the Opposition, who were interested in the Select Committee's recommendations. His primary objective was to maintain the Government's control of the business of the House and to ensure that it got through its legislation on time. But there was a certain amount of pressure for change coming from various quarters of the House, and if he was to achieve his objective, it would be necessary, in his judgement, to give a little on some of the proposals. If he tried to resist this pressure completely, matters were likely to get out of hand. He proposed therefore that the Government should be ready to introduce, on an experimental basis, a limited amount of change to public bill procedure. He agreed that if the Select Committee's recommendation that there should be three sittings in select committee form for the purpose of taking evidence during the committee stage was implemented for all bills, this would cause a lot of additional work for Ministers and officials who would have to give evidence and would add to the Government's problems of managing business, but he believed that there was a good case for treating two or three bills, probably of a non-controversial kind, in the way recommended by the Select Committee in the next session.

The Prime Minister said that she was concerned that Members were already spending a lot of time in committees of various kinds and she was reluctant to increase that still further. The Select Committee's recommendation on public bill procedure would, if implemented, take the House closer to becoming a full-time institution, and if that happened, Members' experience and understanding of the world outside Parliament would be even less than it was now. If there were sittings in select committee form, time would be needed to take evidence from outside bodies as well as from Ministers and officials, and this would inevitably delay getting bills into Standing Committee. For all

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these reasons she was not happy with the proposed changes. She agreed that the Chancellor should bring the matter to Cabinet when he was ready.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

C. A. WHITMORE

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Office of the Chancellor of  
the Duchy of Lancaster