

AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT

Minutes of the meeting in
Lord Carrington's room in the House of Lords
on Tuesday, 6th July, 1976

Present: Lord Carrington (In the Chair)
Mr. Peyton
Mr. Sumption
Mr. Waldegrave
Mr. Younger
Mr. Douglas (Secretary)

Apologies for Absence: Lord Jellicoe, Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Hardy
Mr. Forman.

Lord Carrington explained that he had called the meeting to have a quick round-up of the position as the Committee had not met for a long time and was not due to meet again until the 21st July when Lord Armstrong would be the guest. The Committee would wish to hear Lord Armstrong's views and those of Sir Robert Mark before finalising its report but he thought it would be wise to start some preliminary drafting. He thought that the balance of the evidence the Committee had received so far suggested in the final analysis there was very little that a Government could do if confronted by a widespread challenge to its authority but that there were some general rules and practical points that had emerged in the course of this discussion which were worth recording and could provide useful guidance if the sort of eventuality envisaged were to occur.

Mr. Peyton without disagreeing with this view thought that one of the mistakes that had been made by the last Conservative Government was to underestimate, perhaps because of Civil Service suspicion, the use that can be made of volunteers.

Lord Carrington agreed and said that this was an example of the sort of practical point that should be included in the report. Another was the failure of Government to mobilise support at the start of a potential conflict. At the start of a potential conflict the Government were inhibited by the belief that we should remain neutral while the employers were inhibited by the fear that if they took up any public posture this would make subsequent negotiation more difficult.

Mr. Younger agreed that the balance of evidence from the witnesses was somewhat negative but he thought that they were looking at the situation rather narrowly from the point of view of their own back yard. Looking beyond the actual evidence given he thought one could discern the possibility of at least somewhat more effective action. For example he thought that the evidence suggested that there was a case for a permanent body somewhere in the government machine to prepare and administer contingency plans for the event of a challenge to the authority of government.

Mr. Sumption thought that the evidence had been uneven. He had been convinced that the dockers could bar access to the ports but he had not been convinced for example that the power stations could not be run if the power workers went on strike.

.../Lord Carrington

Lord Carrington asked how the Committee should take evidence from Sir Robert Mark. Lord Jellicoe had sounded out Sir Robert who felt that he could not attend a meeting of the Committee without being at least free to report back to the Home Secretary and since the existence of the Committee could be presented in an unfavourable light this was dangerous. It was agreed that Mr. Peyton and Lord Carrington should invite Sir Robert to lunch and have an informal discussion on which they would report back to the committee.

The Secretary explained that as he had been in the States for most of the meetings of the Committee and had only taken over from Mr. Forman for the last two meetings he would have difficulty in drafting the report. As he understood it, the Committee were addressing themselves to two problems; the first was how a Government could prevent getting into a situation where its authority was challenged and the second was what a Government could do about it if such a situation developed in spite of all attempts to prevent it. The first raised major constitutional questions which had been raised in papers by Mr. Forman taken at early meetings but according to the file nearly all the evidence and discussions of subsequent meetings had been concerned with the latter.

Lord Carrington agreed that these two headings should form the framework for the report with a number of general rules that emerged from the evidence and discussions under each. He suggested that the draft should be prepared jointly by Mr. Forman, Mr. Waldegrave and the Secretary. It was agreed that the Committee's report was to be in the form of confidential guidance for an incoming Government and should not form part of the review of policy currently being carried out by the Party.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 21st July at 6.15 p.m. to which Lord Jellicoe had invited Lord Armstrong to attend.