

1922

18 May 1978

Thank you for your letter of 11th May 1978, confirming the points made by you and your colleagues on the Executive of the 1922 Committee at our meeting on Monday, 8th May.

It is quite clear that you have devoted a great deal of time and thought to these difficult problems of the pay and pensions of MPs and I very much appreciate the trouble you are taking on behalf of all the members of our party. I have no doubt at all that your efforts have been the decisive factor in persuading the Government to bring forward legislation to implement the Boyle recommendations on Members' pensions.

I have had an initial discussion with my colleagues about your suggestions for dealing with Members' pay in the future. Several points were raised, as detailed below, and I would be grateful if you would ponder them and come and talk to me again.

1. The idea that Members of Parliament should be paid a realistic salary is desired by everyone. It is recognised that the Boyle Committee is the best (as well as the only) instrument which can give independent advice about the level of that salary and therefore that it should be invoked.

18 May 1978

2. There is a real difficulty about your proposition that I should give a 'blind' undertaking to put down motions to implement whatever Boyle might recommend 3 months after a General Election. It is likely that one of our promises during the General Election campaign will be to improve the pay of certain groups of people, such as the Police, the Armed Services, the doctors, the dentists, etc. etc. It is by no means certain yet that we shall deem it right to commit ourselves to restore parity to these groups in one single, immediate settlement. If we cannot do this for them, how can we justify doing it for ourselves?
3. Colleagues suggested, as an alternative to your proposition that Boyle should be instructed to report three months after the General Election, that he should be instructed to update his 1975 recommendations forthwith and report as soon as he has done so. This report might come after an early General Election, but, because that Election may be as much as 17 months away, it might come before. It would then fall to the present Government (the only one to fail to recommend in toto the proposals on MP's pay of an independent review body) to declare its position and make a public commitment.

18 May 1978

4. I recognise that your sole concern - most understandably - was with the pay of Members of Parliament. My colleagues and I feel that the pay of Ministers (on which Boyle reported in 1976) should be considered at the same time and that any commitment by the Conservative Party should embrace the two. Otherwise we should be in great difficulty on the relationship between MP and Minister's pay.

5. I would like you to clarify one passage in your letter. On page two you say that it is the wish of the Executive of the 1922 Committee and the Executive of the PLP that the leaders of both main parties should commit themselves to 'tabling the necessary resolutions to implement the Boyle recommendations'. In the following paragraph you say 'we want the Parties to be publicly committed to the procedure only'. I take this to mean that you want the next Government to allow the House of Commons to accept Boyle in toto if it wishes, but that you do not exclude the possibility that the Government might seek to amend Boyle by, say, proposing that the increases should be phased. This would be a somewhat unusual procedure (Government amendments to a Government motion) and I may have misunderstood your intention.

18 May 1978

It is obviously desirable that we should have further discussions after you have considered these points with your colleagues on the Executive of the 1922 Committee. I am most ready to do this whenever we can arrange a mutually convenient occasion.

The Rt Hon Edward du Cann, MP