

May we have some idea  
for the Chief Whip of  
what the procedure is  
and for when.



Prime Minister

We have tentatively  
arranged for you to see  
the COH at 16.30 on  
Monday. Agree? Yes.

PRIME MINISTER

PROCEDURE

Further we shall be able  
to judge better when we  
know whether or not we  
in do it see also attached  
personal letter.

MA 18/vii

I think that I ought to let you know that following our brief discussion in Cabinet on procedure yesterday we had quite a difficult passage in the Commons at Business Questions on the subject of the Government not being now prepared to have a discussion on procedure before the recess. You will no doubt have heard that the Leader of the Opposition referred to this question at the outset of the discussion on business, and it was evident from the response to his words that there was considerable support from all sides of the House for the view that the debate on procedure should be taken before the recess rather than later. Originally I had understood the Opposition's difficulty to be that they wanted more time to consider the issues, but the Leader of the Opposition said that their objection was purely to holding the debate on the Friday of next week, and I therefore said I would discuss further with Merlyn Rees to clarify the point. Although I came under considerable pressure, I think that there would have been much more trouble if I had not been able to reduce the temperature by offering to have the further discussion with Merlyn.

Subsequently I did this, and he confirmed that the objection was purely to the Friday and it became clear that he and his colleagues had put themselves in an awkward position by mis-stating the real grounds of their objection to an early debate. I think that in the circumstances we have no option but to respond to the pressure from the House for a debate before the recess. I can now provide time for this and shall be prepared to do so, subject to the agreement of Cabinet. In order, however, to have a satisfactory debate we need to decide the Government line on the main issues in question and that means, I fear, that I must ask that the consideration of my paper on this subject, which was deferred from yesterday's Cabinet, should be undertaken next Thursday if at all possible. I have considered whether we might defer consideration to the following week. This would however be awkward since it will be necessary to table motions for debate and to give about a week's notice within which Members could consider them, so pushing the debate to the end of the last week before the recess, when substantial numbers of Members will have departed from Westminster and the subject would be unlikely to receive proper and balanced consideration.

I should therefore be glad if I could come to see you on Monday to discuss this question further. I think there is little doubt that unless we can respond satisfactorily next week there will be repeated pressure at Business Questions between now and the recess to redeem our pledge to hold a debate. If we are unable to respond positively, the atmosphere of the House is likely to be soured, and the Government's passage through the remaining weeks before the recess made unnecessarily difficult.

NStJS

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18 July 1980