



*Robinson*

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

21 July 1980

*Dear Robin,*

PROCEDURE

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster called upon the Prime Minister this afternoon to discuss the next steps on procedure in the light of his minute of 18 July 1980.

Mr. St. John-Stevas said that he had had a difficult passage at Business Questions last Thursday when he had found himself under pressure from both Mr. Du Cann and the Opposition front bench. Mr. Callaghan had suggested that he was failing to fulfil the commitments which he had given earlier with regard to a debate on procedure. A further indication of the pressure in the House for a discussion on procedure before the recess was the early day motion which had now been signed by 138 Members. This issue was becoming a running sore both with the House as a whole and with the 1922 Committee in particular. He was now anxious to get it out of the way. He had handled the question in such a way that there were now only two issues outstanding - his proposals for public bills, which involved a very limited and controlled experiment which in his view would not lead to any substantial changes in the end, and his proposals with regard to secondary legislation. He had now talked to Mr. Michael Foot and Mr. Merlyn Rees about how the Opposition wished to proceed, and what they wanted was to have a debate before the recess but to take the resolutions in the spill-over period in October.

The Prime Minister said that she remained concerned at the proposed increase in the number and scope of select committees. The fact was that Conservative Members frequently had commitments outside the House, and this meant that those of them who were members of select committees did not always attend all the meetings of their committees. But Labour members of select committees, many of whom believed that Members should be full-time and not have outside commitments, attended very regularly, and there was therefore a danger that if procedure was changed in the way being proposed by Mr. St. John-Stevas, some Government legislation would be delayed and, at worst, blocked in these new select committees by the Opposition. She was reluctant to overburden Conservative back-benchers any further. The next step was for Cabinet to consider the matter again on Thursday of this week, and she would have the necessary arrangements made. Cabinet would decide whether to proceed in the way now being suggested by the Opposition.

I am sending copies of this letter to Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours etc,*

*Alvin Whinn.*

Robin Birch, Esq.