

Ref. A08398

MR WHITMORE

I understand that Professor Walters has asked if he might be invited to the Ministerial Sub-Committee on the Disposal of Public Sector Assets (E(DL)) when the Financial Secretary's paper on methods of privatisation (E(DL)(82)5) is discussed.

2. There are of course plenty of precedents for Ministerial advisers attending meetings of Official Committees. Mr Young, as the adviser to the Secretary of State for Industry, used to accompany his Secretary of State to meetings of E(DL). But I know of no precedent for Ministerial advisers attending meetings of Ministerial Cabinet Committees in their own right, otherwise than in attendance upon their Ministers. Considerable latitude has developed over the attendance of the Prime Minister's advisers at Cabinet Committees which the Prime Minister herself chairs, as Professor Walters himself attends meetings of E, although at such formal meetings (as opposed to informal meetings) the convention is that they are unseen and unheard, and their presence is unrecorded. There are also special rules for the Head and Deputy Head of the Central Policy Review Staff who advise Ministers collectively and are regular invitees on a formal basis to certain Cabinet Committees, some chaired by the Prime Minister and some chaired by other Ministers. It is however a different and new proposition that one of the Prime Minister's advisers should attend a meeting of a Cabinet Ministerial Committee which she does not herself chair, especially if the intention is to take an active part in the discussion. It would be an innovation which might not be welcomed by all the Prime Minister's colleagues.

3. In order to avoid that kind of problem, it should be possible to find other ways to enable Professor Walters to contribute to the debate on methods of privatisation. A letter could go round from No 10 drawing the attention of Ministers



attending E(DL) to a note setting out Professor Walters's views, and the letter could be referred to as a relevant document on the E(DL) agenda. Moreover if, as seems likely, officials are instructed to undertake further work following the discussion in E(DL), or there are subsequent informal meetings involving Ministers and officials, there would be no difficulty in Professor Walters taking part in such meetings, by arrangement with the Chancellor or whoever had responsibility for convening such discussions.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

12th May 1982