

*Prime Minister -*

*Mr Mount would like to attend the Ministerial Committee which the Home Secretary chairs - H and Misc 79. I understand Mr Whitaker has no objection. But this would be a new departure, and so I suggest Sir Robert Armstrong's views. He sets them out below.*

Ref. A08751

MR. WHITMORE

*Are you content for Mr Mount to attend these committees, despite the problems?*

We spoke about Mr. Mount's attendance at MISC 79 and H.

*Yes Mr. Whit. 18th*

2. As I said in the minute I sent to you on 12th May, it would be a 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.

3. The adviser concerned would be in an anomalous and possibly delicate position vis-a-vis Ministers on the Committee concerned. Mr. Mount says that he could make it clear that he would not be speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister but would be trying to elucidate the issues in order to inform her on them. I am not sure about that: even if he disclaimed the Prime Minister's authority, Ministers would be bound to read her views into what he said; and might feel that they would prefer themselves to inform her in their own way and time on the issues and on their views about them.

4. Attendance at Ministerial Committees is not the only way in which the Policy Unit can become aware of Ministerial thinking and of the arguments being put. They can and presumably do see inter-Ministerial correspondence copied to the Prime Minister and the papers and minutes of Ministerial Cabinet Committees; and they are able (as Departmental officials are not) to go and talk privately to the Prime Minister's Departmental colleagues.

5. This is not so much a matter of protocol as of protecting the Prime Minister's relationships with her colleagues. It is my duty to draw her attention to the potential risks and embarrassments; it is of course for her to decide whether the advantages outweigh those risks.

6. This of course raises in miniature issues which would arise more acutely in relation to a Prime Minister's Department. The Prime Minister has once or twice reverted to that recently. Perhaps we ought now to have the extended discussion of that subject which we did not have when it was raised and was the subject of a minute I sent you last autumn.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18th June, 1982