

10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER.

1. I ATTENDED THE SCOTTISH MEMBERS
BACK BENCH COMMITTEE YESTERDAY.

2. AFTERWARDS, IAIN SPENCER AND MICHAEL
ANGRIMM CAME AND HAD A LONG TALK.

3. SUBSEQUENTLY, I TALKED TO MICHAEL
JOPLING.

4. MICHAEL SAYS HE CANNOT GIVE UP,
AND THAT HIS AGREEMENT WITH COX MUST
STAND.

5. MAY WE HAVE A WORD ABOUT THIS
PLEASE?

~~Mr~~ ~~Spencer~~

Ian.
1/11/79

- Have been
awfully
lax. Mr

From: Iain Sproat, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

25th October 1979

Dear Margaret,

I am sending you herewith correspondence I am having with Lord Thorneycroft and the Chief Whip regarding the chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee, because I believe it absolutely vital, for reasons set out in this correspondence, that the chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee remains in Conservative hands.

Normally I would not bother you with a matter of this sort, but, in view of the terrible time we have been through in Scotland over Devolution, and the grave difficulty which the Conservative Party in Scotland faces in winning more seats, I want to make it known at the highest level that this Select Committee will be different from all the others and must be seen in the context of politics in Scotland rather than of just another Committee of the House of Commons. I hope, therefore, it will be possible to settle this matter in the way I suggest in my letter to the Chief Whip.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Iain'.

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.

From: Iain Sproat, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

25th October 1979

Dear Michael,

Thank you very much for listening so patiently to the Scottish Conservative Committee members yesterday afternoon, and for being so straightforward with us about the situation. We certainly appreciate the problems you face having agreed to give Labour 7 Select Committee chairmanships, and the extreme difficulty you would have at this stage in changing that principle. I hope also, however, that you now appreciate the problems we would have in Scotland in handing over so influential and authoritative a position as the chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee to a Labour M.P. The situation in Scotland is politically ultra-sensitive and the chairman of this new Select Committee would have the opportunity to criticise and embarrass the Government and to boost Labour throughout Scotland in a way that has no parallel in the other Select Committees dealing with other Departments (apart, perhaps, from Wales).

However, the purpose of this letter is not to rehearse yet again all the arguments why the Scottish Select Committee is a different animal from the others, but to suggest a compromise, and a way out of the position in which we find ourselves: This way out is that you maintain the same numerical distribution of Select Committee chairmanships, but within that principle, exchange the chairmanship of the Energy Select Committee for the chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee, putting Labour instead of Conservative into the chair at Energy and putting Conservative instead of Labour into the chair in Scotland (I only suggest Energy because that was one of the Committees you mentioned yesterday that had a Tory chairman. Obviously, it would make no difference from our point of view if the change was, say, with Trade).

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The Rt. Hon. T.M. Jopling, M.P.
25th October 1979
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I have discussed this with all the members of the Scottish Conservative Committee and they are unanimous in supporting this compromise.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'T.M. Jopling', written over a vertical line.

The Rt. Hon. T.M. Jopling, M.P.

From: Iain Sproat, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

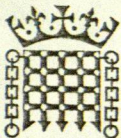
25th October 1979

Dear Peter,

As chairman of the Scottish Conservative Backbench Committee, I am writing to ask you most strongly to intervene urgently in the situation over the chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee. You may wonder what this has to do with you as Chairman of the Party: let me therefore explain.

As you will know 14 new-style Select Committees are about to be set up, including one to monitor the activities of the Scottish Office. However, there is a most important difference between the Scottish Select Committee and all the others (apart, I imagine, from the Welsh Committee). This difference is that whereas the Energy Select Committee or the Transport Select Committee, for example, will attract some publicity in the specialist media, and from time to time in the general media, the affairs of the Scottish Select Committee will be subject to intense, constant, and contentious scrutiny by the Scottish media. The chairman of the Committee is likely to be on television in Scotland, for example, as much as the Secretary of State for Scotland himself - a superb platform for either supporting or attacking the Government. My Conservative Backbench colleagues were therefore horrified to learn that, without any consultation with ourselves, it had been agreed through the usual channels that the chairman of the new Select Committee should be a Labour M.P. When my colleagues and I learnt this, by way of a leak by Labour to a Scottish newspaper, we could hardly believe it. We found, and find it, totally unacceptable. We have made the strongest representations to the Chief Whip about it, but, while he has been extremely courteous, he has so far been unwilling to renegotiate the arrangement he had arrived at with Labour over the chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee.

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The Rt. Hon. Lord Thorneycroft
25th October 1979
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The reason that I ask you to intervene urgently and strongly is because, while the chairmanship of the other Select Committees is mainly a House of Commons matter, the Scottish Select Committee will have its maximum impact in Scotland itself (where it is certain to sit very frequently) and to be intensely party-political. Although the Conservatives will have the majority on this Committee, by far the greatest single power and influence, in the public eye, (whatever may be true of the actual mechanics of the Committee) will be wielded by the chairman. It is, to me and my colleagues utterly inconceivable that we should gratuitously hand over this superb propaganda platform to Labour. It is already a hard enough job for we as the Conservatives to keep our end up, outnumbered as we are by 44 Labour M.P.s to 22 Tory M.P.s; and, in practice by 49 Opposition M.P.s to 12 Tory Backbenchers, because of the number of Scottish Tory M.P.s who are members of the Government. To present the chairmanship of this important new Committee to Labour would make our job of winning back Scotland for the Conservatives even harder, would help enormously to give credibility to Labour's claim, endlessly promulgated in Scotland, that, although the Tories are currently in the Scottish Office, it is Labour who are the real Government, and true representatives of the people in Scotland.

What is certain is that when Labour are the Government, they would never give us the chairmanship. So, by giving them the chairmanship now, we are condemning ourselves to a very long time of Labour chairmanship in the Select Committee - say, 10 to 15 years at the shortest - until the distant day when the Tories have the majority of seats in Scotland again.

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The Rt. Hon. Lord Thorneycroft.
25th October 1979
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Since, therefore, this is ultimately a party matter of helping to win more seats in Scotland, of getting our propaganda and policy over to voters in Scotland, of not giving Labour help to strengthen their current, deeply regrettable, hold on Scotland, I appeal to you as chairman of the Party, since these matters are your concern. I repeat: this is not primarily a House of Commons matter, but a Scottish matter, and it must be seen in the context of the Conservative party struggling to move upwards in a Scotland that is politically ultra sensitive, having only recently come through the fire of Devolution and all that.

I enclose a copy of a letter I have sent this morning to the Chief Whip, suggesting a way out of the difficulty.

You may find it useful to discuss this with Russell Fairgrieve, as chairman of the Party in Scotland.

Yours ever,

c.c. The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.
Members of the Scottish Conservative Committee
The Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, M.P.
The Rt. Hon. George Younger, M.P.
R. Fairgrieve, Esq., M.P.
The Rt. Hon. T.M. Jopling, M.P.

The Rt. Hon. Lord Thorneycroft,
Conservative & Unionist Central Office,
32 Smith Square,
London, SW1P 3HH



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

25 October 79.

SCOTTISH SELECT COMMITTEE

Dear James,

Most of our members are travelling up to

Scotland today, including myself. I hope, therefore,

you can ensure that no decision on the

chairmanship of the Scottish Select Committee is

made until we all return next Monday, +

have a chance to discuss with you further developments.

I enclose copies of letters I have written to the Prime

Minister, the Chief Whip + Ed. Thompson with.

Yours ever,
James