

Prime Minister



The opposition are insisting that all proposals to put Bills to Second Reading Committee procedure should be discussed with them through "the usual channels" rather than between ministers and their opposite numbers.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

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I understand this is because Mr Sprouat wrote to his opposite number proposing second reading committee procedure for a Bill, and failed to sign the letter, which also contained a number of typing errors. Michael Coker seems to have overreached.

As you know, we have customarily had an arrangement with the Opposition whereby the Minister in charge of a Bill which the Government judged suitable for Second Reading Committee procedure would discuss with the Opposition Front Bench spokesman whether or not the Opposition would be prepared to agree to this procedure. Only in the light of that agreement would the Bill be introduced.

WR
10/11

MS

I am writing to inform you and other colleagues that the Opposition have now put a block on this arrangement. Would you therefore please ensure that no further discussions with Opposition spokesmen take place on these matters? Any Bills which were scheduled to be dealt with in this way should be referred to Mr Maclean in the Chief Whip's office. Proceedings on any Bills to which the Opposition have already agreed must be postponed until further discussions have taken place through the usual channels.

I am copying this to all Cabinet colleagues, Michael Jopling, the Chief Whip (Lords) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

John Biffen

JOHN BIFFEN

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