

Prime Minister:

To note

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PRIME MINISTER

REPORT FROM THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
STANDING ORDERS (REVISION) 1982-3

A report was made to the House of Commons earlier this month by the Select Committee on Standing Orders (Revision). An early response is desirable so that the Standing Orders of the House can be reprinted, and in order that arrangements can go ahead for a new edition of Erskine May.

Select committees of this type are set up by the House from time to time - the last was in 1970 - to "report upon the rearrangement and redrafting of the Standing Orders so as to bring them into conformity with existing practice". They are mainly concerned with the removal of procedural dead wood; the standardisation of phraseology; renumbering; and clarification. Almost all of the present Committee's 263 proposed amendments to Standing Orders are of this "tidying up" kind and would appear uncontroversial.

The report does, however, contain two more significant recommendations which I would wish to bring to the attention of colleagues.

The first (paragraph 14 of the report) proposes that Members suspended from the House for disorderly conduct should "forfeit their salary during their suspension". This is represented as a clarification of the punitive intention of the present SO No 24. It would seem, however, to lie well outside the Select Committee's terms of reference. Moreover, it could be controversial, not least because a suspended Member still has his constituency responsibilities.

The other is the recommendation (paragraph 18) that Standing Order No 86A(5), which would enable a sub-committee on the Nationalised Industries to be formed from members of the relevant Departmental select committees, should be revised so that the committee would become a sub-committee of whichever Departmental select committee its chairman is a member. This is designed to remove a procedural obstacle which has hitherto rendered the provision inoperative. But it would again seem outside the Committee's terms of reference, and runs contrary to a recommendation recently made by the Liaison Committee of Select Committee Chairmen in the report on the select committee system. It is also relevant to the Parliamentary Control of Expenditure (Reform) Bill now in Committee. It, therefore, seems best to defer consideration of this particular recommendation.

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This report will come before the House next Wednesday, 30 March. I would propose to table a Government Motion accordingly, recommending the adoption of all the Committee's proposed amendments, except for the proposed fines on suspended Members, to be rejected, and the proposed revision of Standing Order No 86A(5).

I am copying this to Cabinet colleagues, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

WJB

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28 March 1983

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Parliament

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

30 March, 1983.

Report from the Select Committee on
Standing Orders (Revision) 1982-83

The Prime Minister was grateful for the Lord President's minute of 28 March, which she has noted without comment.

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

W.F.S. HICKETT

Nicholas Huxtable, Esq.,
Lord President's Office.

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