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*Mr. Tebbit*

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2AI

26 October 1982

Prime Minister

Dear Norman.

*ds*

*mm*  
*24/10*

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT: MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

Thank you for your letter of 14 October letting me know the line you intend to take if the Select Committee on Employment ask you to give evidence to them about the arrangements for inter-Departmental consultation on issues potentially affecting employment.

As you know, our general policy in dealing with requests from the Departmental select committees for specific information on sensitive matters has been to offer generalised information and avoid flat refusals as far as possible, whilst remaining firm in refusing to disclose information which could affect a small number of areas of particular importance. In this way we have generally managed to avoid direct confrontations.

As I see it, the two potential areas of information at risk here are the organisation of inter-Ministerial committees, and especially Cabinet committees (other than those whose existence has already been disclosed), and any information which could be used by select committees to try and play one Minister or Department against another and to seek to undermine the general principle of collective Ministerial responsibility for Government decisions at whatever level.

I, therefore, entirely share your view that, if questioned on the extent to which you or your Department have been consulted on matters which have employment implications, it would be desirable to rely as far as possible on the generalities that you are satisfied that the necessary arrangements for the co-ordination of Departmental views on matters affecting employment are adequate; that the level of consultation varies with the issues involved; and that you are also satisfied that, as necessary, you are consulted personally. As you point out, there are opportunities, both for Ministers and officials, to make complaints if they do not consider they have been properly consulted on particular issues.

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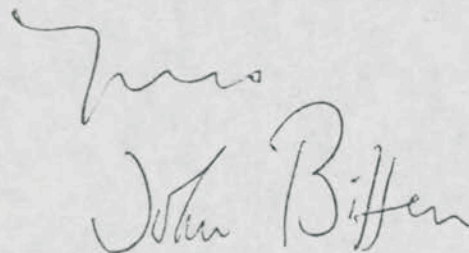
The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP  
Secretary of State for Employment  
Caxton House  
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As you recognise, the real difficulties are likely to start if the Committee are not satisfied with these generalities and pursue specific issues, such as whether a particular Minister was consulted on a particular matter; at what level official Departmental consultation took place; or whether there are standing inter-Departmental arrangements to consider particular matters.

It is obviously difficult to be precise about these hearings, since so much is bound to depend on the atmosphere of the Committee on the day, and how far a willing tone, without specific replies, is likely to be acceptable. But, like you, I am inclined to the view that, if questions of the kind indicated above are pressed, one could only repeat the general position as you have suggested. On the other hand, I can see little harm in referring to specific standing arrangements for inter-Departmental consultation on particular topics as examples of inter-Departmental consultation in matters affecting employment, provided that the disclosure of these arrangements does not, for example, imply the existence of Cabinet committees or reveal sensitive policy issues currently under consideration.

I very much doubt whether an approach to Edward du Cann would serve any useful purpose at this point. The Liaison Committee has no direct control over the Employment Committee, and in any case I doubt whether any approach at this stage could be sufficiently specific until we know definitely the information on which the Employment Committee set particular store. But I would be very ready to consider an approach to Edward du Cann later, if it proved impossible to satisfy the Committee on the lines suggested above.

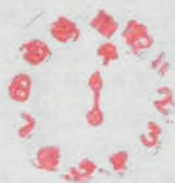
I am copying this to ~~No~~ 10 and Sir Robert Armstrong.



JOHN BIFFEN

Manpower  
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28 OCT 1982





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14 October 1982

*Q John.*

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT: MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

When officials of my Department gave oral evidence to the Select Committee on Employment on 14 July in pursuance of the Committee's enquiry into employment creation, they were closely questioned as to the machinery which existed for ensuring that employment effects were given due consideration in the formulation of government policies which might have a bearing on this.

In accordance with the Notes for the Guidance of Officials (which are, of course, available in the Library of the House) and briefing they had received from the MPO in advance, my officials took the line that consultation took place in a variety of ways and that the ministers concerned were in general satisfied that it was adequate but that they could not, without specific ministerial authority, disclose details either generally or in relation to particular decisions.

John Golding found this unsatisfactory - naturally enough - as it goes to the heart of the enquiry he is trying to undertake, and indicated that he would be summoning me personally to give evidence in due course. I expect to receive a summons shortly and am therefore writing to clear with you in advance the line I propose to take since the matter is clearly of wider significance.

I would propose to say that I share the implied view of the Committee that this Department should be consulted by other Departments on any matter which has significant employment implications and, as the responsible Minister, I am satisfied that in general this happens; like any Cabinet Minister I can raise with my colleagues - in Cabinet if necessary - any matter in which I might feel there had been insufficient consultation,



or that employment considerations were being given insufficient weight. I would however decline, on grounds of collective ministerial responsibility, to comment on the extent or level at which my Department had been consulted on any particular issue.

I am less clear as to how far I should go in describing, in general terms, such standing machinery as exists for ensuring that these consultations take place. It is, as I understand it, not our policy to disclose the existence of any ministerial committee other than those which have already been publicly identified by the Prime Minister (including the Economic Strategy Committee) and that this embargo extends to Official Cabinet Committees. I understand that MPO take the view that there would be no harm in revealing the existence of standing committees which were not Official Cabinet Committees - such as the inter-departmental Manpower Group which meets under the chairmanship of a DE official and includes representatives of the MSC. However this seems to me to be a difficult line to hold and my inclination is that I should either refuse to discuss any standing machinery or be free to indicate the existence of particular machinery to deal with particular types of problems without distinction as to whether or not it has the status of any Official Cabinet Committee.

There are clearly sensitive issues involved here, going well beyond the remit of the Employment Committee. It may be that you would want to have a word with Edward Du Cann to see how far he is prepared to support John Golding along this line.

I am copying this letter to No 10 and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*J. Norman*

Manpower: Special Enpt. Measures  
At. 8

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