

Top Copy on: Security, May '79,
Official Secrets Act Reform: Security

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 May 1979

B.F. 17/5

Dear Bill,

OPEN GOVERNMENT/OFFICIAL SECRETS

The Prime Minister is aware that early action will be expected on open government questions and on the future of the Official Secrets Act. The Attorney General had these subjects under study before the Government took Office and the Prime Minister would be grateful for early advice on how the Government might approach these issues.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Stevens (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office), John Chilcot (Home Office), David Laughrin (CSD) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever
Mike Pattison

W.C. Beckett, Esq., CB,
Law Officers' Department.

Top Copy on: Security, May 29,
Reform of the Official
Secrets Act.

Ref. A09459

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PRIME MINISTER

House of Commons Procedure: Open Government:
Official Secrets

The Government are likely to be asked early in the new Parliament whether they support the immediate reorganisation of the Select Committees to monitor the work of Departments, as proposed in the Report of the Procedure Committee. Or alternatively whether, at least for the time being, they favour the appointment of select committees on the existing basis.

2. In the Manifesto you undertook to give the House the early chance of coming to a decision on the Report. You may like to seek the Lord President's advice on the handling of its various recommendations and on the extent to which the Government should commend them to the House. The Cabinet Office are preparing a fuller note for him.

3. The Procedure Committee's proposals have some links with Open Government and Official Secrets; in particular there is the recommendation that select committees should have wider powers to order the attendance of Ministers and the production of papers and records. The Government will wish to consider this carefully. | With its reference to the release of documents, it ties in with Open Government and raises some of the questions discussed in the previous Administration's Green Paper. The counterpart of open government are official secrets and the acknowledged need to amend Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act. The two subjects were, of course, taken together in Mr. Freud's Freedom of Information Bill.

4. You may think that it would be worth having the three issues *No* examined together by a group of Ministers under the chairmanship of the Lord President: if so, I could let you have advice on composition. Alternatively, you could invite the Lord President to advise urgently on the

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Procedure of the House, the Lord Privy Seal to work up proposals on open government and the Home Secretary to bring forward a Bill to amend the Official Secrets Act.

5. Assuming that there will in due course be much more systematic openness in Government, there is a case for correspondingly tighter control over the unauthorised disclosure of material which continues to be restricted. The last Government had an increasingly bad record for leaks, and you may want to set a different tone from the outset.

Michael Havers has
already started.
The matter will
be dealt with.
See no
reason for any committee
ans.

John
4/5
John Hunt