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PRIME MINISTER

H COMMITTEE MINUTES

You may be interested to see the attached copy of the minutes of the H Committee held on Tuesday 29 June. The main item of business was the Police and Criminal Procedures Bill and you have already seen the major papers produced, one on the introduction of an independent element into the investigation of complaints against police, and on consultation between the police and the community, about which I have given you an additional note from the Home Office. The Committee also discussed a number of relatively minor changes in the law of criminal evidence, including changes in the status of spouses as witnesses in criminal cases, and in the admissibility of computer evidence. For the most part the Committee accepted the proposals set out in the papers before it, although there was some discussion about whether complainants against the police ought to have direct access to the independent assessor rather than, as proposed, going through the Home Secretary which would expose the latter to continuous political pressure (I understand this is a point made by the CPRS). It was also noted that the issues both of complaints and consultation would raise particularly difficult issues in Northern Ireland and that consideration of legislation to apply them there should await the passage of the England and Wales Bill.

The Home Secretary's major point is that the Bill as a whole should be presented as a balanced package containing on the one hand measures to increase the powers of police along the lines proposed by the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure while on the other hand improving police relations with their local communities and increasing confidence in the investigation of complaints.

The Committee also considered that perennial hot potato, experiments on animals. The position is that the Government's election manifesto included a commitment to replace the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 which regulates animal experiments.

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This commitment has been reaffirmed on several occasions recently but has been placed in the context of the Council of Europe Convention on animal experimentation which has now been concluded. The Committee proposed, therefore, a White Paper well before the next General Election; such a White Paper would have to tackle ahead on the disagreement between this country and the other participants in the Convention on the so-called "pain condition". This essentially comes down to whether there is an inviolable prohibition on the causing of severe pain in experiments (of which we are in favour) or whether there should be certain exemptions. As I know from my Home Office days, animal experiments are a highly emotive subject and the Government will receive small thanks for tackling a long overdue task.

Tim Heber

30 June 1982