

ROBIN

cc Tim

Mr Beaumont telephoned to say that he is sending over by hand a copy of the Speaker's statement for this afternoon on Members' interests.

He said that you might like to know that you have no need for concern.

Angela
30.1.84
10.00

Penrith and The Border Constituency

3.44 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have to inform the House that, as required by section 144 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, I have received the certificate and report of the election court in the case of the petition alleging corrupt and illegal practices in the Penrith and The Border constituency by-election.

The judges have determined that the petition be dismissed and that the hon. Member for that constituency was duly returned at the said election. I shall lay both documents on the Table, together with the shorthand writer's note, and will cause the full text of the two documents to be entered in the Journal.

Members Declarations of Interest

3.45 pm

Mr. Speaker: Last Thursday, in response to requests from hon. Members, I undertook to give further consideration to the question of Members' interests. There are three matters which it would be helpful for me to make clear to the House.

The first relates to the declaration of the interests of Members' children in the Register of Members' Interests. In the introduction to the last published register, the registrar states that Members are not required to disclose "the interests of spouses or children, except in certain circumstances relating to shareholdings".

The rule about registering shareholdings is confined to the holdings of infant children. There is, therefore, no interest to register in the case referred to by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

The second matter concerns the declaration of interests in the House. I reaffirm what I said last Thursday. It is contrary to our practice for interests to be declared during questions and answers.

Finally, I remind the House that the events to which reference was made on Thursday took place in 1981. I am not aware that anything has taken place in the present Parliament which is contrary to the rules of the House governing direct declarations of interests. Those rules have not changed between the last Parliament and the present one. Comment on what took place in a previous Parliament is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I submit a new point of order in the light of the ruling that you have made today? You have referred to the Register of Members' Interests, but my point of order on Thursday was far more closely related to declarations of interest to the House, and specifically to the Prime Minister's decision not to declare an interest directly after my hon. Friends the Members for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) had put their questions but before she replied.

Paragraph 293(3) of the "Manual of Procedure" says:

"A declaration should be made where appropriate at the beginning of most oral interventions in proceedings. This covers participation in debate in the House or in standing committee and at meetings of select committees, where a Member is required to declare his interest before putting a question to a witness and before the commencement of an inquiry, in order to cover the committee's deliberative proceedings."

Then it states:

"It is not necessary to declare an interest before asking a supplementary question."

That is the basis on which I understand that you, Mr. Speaker, have made your ruling today. I put it to you, however, that if the term

"most oral interventions in proceedings"

is so specific that it excludes specific oral intervention by asking a supplementary question—in other words, it is not required to declare an interest in asking a supplementary question—it must surely include oral answers. One must differentiate between an oral answer and an oral question. An oral answer is a statement to the House of Commons. Surely it is not in order for a Minister making a statement or giving an answer to the House to claim the rights and privileges which can be attributed to an oral question.

establish over the weekend precisely what was being proposed, and it was only yesterday that the announcement was made in France. I reported what the French Minister said to me, but obviously it is a detailed matter; we must look at the number of ports involved and see the exact pattern and so on. That is what our officials are trying to do this afternoon. It is more complicated than just a simple ban, and we shall be giving serious consideration to what we discover as a result of the meeting this afternoon.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Does this ban apply to other countries in the EC? If so, should we not be discussing it with other countries, it being a matter for the whole of the EC and not one just between Britain and France?

Mr. MacGregor: That is correct; it does apply to other countries. The reason that has been given for it is the fear of contaminated imports as a result of foot and mouth disease in the Netherlands. As my hon. Friend is probably aware, under a Community decision, meat and certain meat products may not be exported to France and other member states from those areas in the Netherlands which are now subject to foot and mouth disease restrictions. The Commission, I know, is also looking into the matter to establish the details, and if necessary we shall consider raising the issue at the next Council meeting.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is this restriction or ban—whatever one cares to call it—another benefit that we have gained as a result of our entry into the Common Market? Can the hon. Gentleman recall how much we were promised by the Social Democrat types and others who dragged Britain into the Community in 1971? I am waiting to hear of the benefits that we are getting. All we seem to get from Government spokesmen on the subject is a load of misery.

Mr. MacGregor: The straight answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that our meat exports are expanding all the time and that we are benefiting in many ways from our membership of the Community. That is why we are anxious that there should not be artificial restrictions on that increasing flow of trade.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): Does my hon. Friend agree that there will be delays at the ports where the restrictions are in force and that this will have an effect on the amount of beef that is able to pass through them? As there were problems in the recent past about the entry of the meat through the French ports even when they were all operating, will he ensure in the course of his investigations that there is a faster movement of meat through the ports? Any diminution in the time that it takes for it to pass through is important, and I urge my hon. Friend to make the necessary representations to the French authorities. Any waste of time will seriously affect the meat, including that which comes from Scotland, especially from my constituency.

Mr. MacGregor: I accept that there should not be undue delays in the importation of the products affected into France. It was precisely for that reason that I raised the issue so quickly on Friday, and that is why we shall be having a meeting this afternoon. I think that my hon.

Friend will agree that we could not have acted more quickly. Once we have the precise details we shall be following them up.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Could my hon. Friend at the earliest possible opportunity calculate the additional cost by commodity in terms of the delay in distribution and publish the details in the *Official Report*? Would he agree with me that the underlying reason for this ban or restriction has much to do with the recent insurgency of the French agricultural lobby and with the fact that the common agricultural policy is running out of funds, and that the way in which we should proceed is to have more national agriculture policies within the CAP so that individual countries are better able to look after their own farming interests?

Mr. MacGregor: These are extremely early days and we are not sure at this stage whether any meat has been restricted. However, if my hon. Friend wishes to table a question in due course, I shall attempt to answer it. I cannot make any comment on his second point at this stage. I shall be unable to do so until we have further details. On his third point, I do not believe that we should return to a heavy dependence on state aids as distinct from having a common agricultural policy because of incidents such as the one that we are discussing. That is not the right way to meet the problems that we are facing.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Minister referred earlier to the number of ports of entry for UHT milk, which he thought was about right. Is there not now an entirely new situation and ought we not to be reviewing the number of ports of entry for UHT milk as a way of levying pressure?

Mr. MacGregor: We have 17 points of entry, which we think is right for UHT milk. These are the ports where we have the machinery for the work that is necessary. I think that we should wait to see how many points of entry will continue to be available to meat exporters to France before we even begin to consider judgments of the sort suggested by the right hon. Gentleman. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) said, a tit-for-tat trade war would not be in the interests of either party. That is why I put the emphasis on not impeding the flow of trade.

Mr. Speaker: I believe that I called the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) in error. I should have called the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes), and I do so now.

Mr. Mark Hughes: (City of Durham): Can the Minister assure the House that he is satisfied that this action is not a riposte to the campaign in *The Sun* and by other elements against the French manipulation of regulations? If the discussions with the French authorities bear fruit, will he ensure that the opportunity is made available—I see that the Leader of the House is sitting next to the Minister—for a statement to be made in some form tomorrow?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I have no evidence that that is so. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman's representations have been heard; perhaps we can discuss the matter, if necessary, in the usual way.

I shall illustrate how I differentiate between the question and the statement by referring to the intervention of the Minister for Health on glue sniffing on 15 December 1983. He was referring to a written answer which had been referred to by some as a statement. He said:

"Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed true that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security today answered a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) about glue sniffing. That was the intended statement of policy that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I had in mind. I am sorry if the use of the word "statement" misled the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) into believing that it meant an oral statement, but I believe that one can find plenty of precedents for the repeated use of the word "statement" to mean written or oral statements to the House."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1983; Vol. 50, c. 1179.]

What I am saying is that, the moment the right hon. Lady the Prime Minister stood at that Dispatch Box, she was making an oral statement in reply to an oral question. As such, that oral statement cannot claim the privileges that relate to an oral question.

There is another precedent. It is a question that I believe was put down orally on 3 March 1981 by the late Sir Graham Page, in which he asked the Prime Minister whether she would make a statement about Lord Diplock's first report on the interception of communications in Great Britain. She did so. She replied. Therefore she made a statement. She referred to

"Lord Diplock's first report as monitor of the arrangements for interception".—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1981; Vol. 1000 c. 64.]

I will not go into the details of the reply. All these precedents—there are many of them, and indeed, the Minister for Health refers to the precedents—clearly wished to differentiate between questions and answers. If that is the case, surely it is in order for hon. Members who feel strongly about this matter to ask you, Mr. Speaker, once again having looked at this matter from the basis of a question, to reconsider the position with a view to establishing whether it would be the same if my original point or order had related specifically to an answer or statement.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not the case that the House has never enforced the order on the declaration of interests against its own Members? There is, in fact, at least one right hon. Member who refuses to comply with the Standing Order as to the Register of Members' Interests, and the House has taken no action to enforce that order.

Is it not, moreover, the case, Mr. Speaker, that if Members were required to declare in the register or in debate the interests of adult children, that could not be done unless the House made an order, which it has never made, requiring adult children to declare their interests to their parents? Without that, their parents could not be under an obligation to declare an interest. I should have thought that that follows as night follows day. If the House wants to extend the existing rules on declaration of interests, it should surely start by enforcing them against its own Members.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. While I think that it is fairly clear that a Member is not required to declare an interest on the basis upon which you have ruled, I wonder whether the House has envisaged

circumstances in which Members might like to seek to uphold the honour and integrity of public life by declaring their children's interests?

If I could refer it to you, Mr. Speaker, paragraph 53 of the Select Committee's report on Members' interests states:

"It will also, of course, be perfectly possible for a Member, if he or she thought it right and relevant to do so, to disclose any particular interest held by his wife or her husband or children."

In my respectful submission, Mr. Speaker, where the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) goes wrong is that he does not recognise that in this case last week military sources confirmed diplomatic sources that the Prime Minister knew about the particular interest involved in this case. Therefore, I respectfully submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that through you, she ought to be encouraged to make a voluntary declaration or, if she does not want to do that it might be right for the House to consider reconvening the Select Committee on Conduct of Members to inquire into what happened.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. As one of those who raised the matter on Thursday, I am grateful to you for the careful consideration that you have given to these matters. I should like to ask whether you would be prepared to give further consideration to the matters that have been raised today, especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). Those matters are most important for guidance to hon. Members and also for refining and clarifying the precedents upon which registration and the declaration of interests should be made. We must draw a very careful distinction between the registration of interests upon which hon. Members take various views and the declaration of interests in the House during its proceedings.

I repeat the part of the 1980 edition of the "Manual of Procedure" to which my hon. Friend drew attention:

"A declaration should be made where appropriate at the beginning of most oral interventions in proceedings."

We are asking, Mr. Speaker, whether you will consider whether written replies and replies to oral questions constitute statements. If they do—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: They do.

Mr. Madden: If they do, Mr. Speaker, after you have considered those matters, it would follow that, in future, declarations of interests would appropriately be made when such statements were made to the House.

The circumstances have been made exceptionally difficult because of the refusal of the Table Office in recent days to accept questions on those matters. Hon. Members have been left with no other option but to raise them at Question Time. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Pure malice."] Therefore, we believe that if a statement relating to those matters is made by a Minister—whether it is the Prime Minister or any other Minister—a declaration of interest would be justified. I hope that you will be able to give further consideration to those matters, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Given the evident determination of the Prime Minister not to make a statement in the House and understanding your previous ruling, would it not be of enormous benefit to the House, the Prime Minister and the country if Mr. Mark Thatcher made a statement on the matter?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. In your ruling you mentioned three different reasons, the last of which was that you could not be held responsible for what happened in a previous Parliament. We all understand that. You will appreciate, however, that at the time of the case of Reginald Maudling, arising out of the Poulson affair, the bankruptcy and so on, a Select Committee dealt with the matter and reported to the House. A vote was taken in the House. That was in a different Parliament from the one that was sitting when the events took place. Some of the occurrences in the Poulson affair took place over a much longer period. Therefore, I should have thought that there were circumstances in which what happened in a previous Parliament was bound to affect the next Parliament.

One of the reasons why we consider that it is important that a statement is made is in respect of the amount of money that Mark Thatcher received.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): How does the hon. Gentleman know how much he received?

Mr. Skinner: For instance, the late Tony Crosland might have been called upon to divulge the fact that he got a silver coffee pot worth a few pounds. In the Reginald Maudling case, his son Martin was involved. The Select Committee referred to Martin Maudling at length, not because he had received a small amount of money, but because he was a director of OSB and ITCS. It would be helpful if we could ascertain how much Mark Thatcher received. If he received a six-figure sum, as has been suggested, I and many other hon. Members believe that a statement should be made in view of the connection between Mrs. Thatcher's lobbying and her son acting as a consultant.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. These are serious and sensitive issues, and I am grateful to you for your careful statement. As your statement covered three separate aspects of the matter, you will not be surprised that a number of supplementary questions have been asked and that we will want to give the matter a great deal of serious consideration. I hope that in turn you will give further consideration to the important point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) who began the supplementary questions.

In the meantime, can you, Mr. Speaker, confirm that you have made your ruling solely on the basis of the relevant resolutions and precedents of the House and that, like the rest of us, you had no access to any facts or purported facts in this case, including whether Mr. Mark Thatcher joined the Prime Minister in Oman and whether any financial consideration was involved in his relationship with the firm of Cementation Ltd.? Can you confirm also that the matters that have been raised with you involve the rules of conduct of Ministers of the Crown just as much as, if not more than, other hon. Members and that responsibility and accountability for the conduct of Ministers of the Crown lie with the Prime Minister and not with you, Mr. Speaker?

The Select Committee, which in December 1974 produced the rules upon which the declaration of Members' interests are made and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) referred, specifically envisaged circumstances outside the rules where

"It will be . . . possible for a Member, if he or she thought it right and relevant to do so, to disclose any particular interest held by his wife or her husband or children."

Although we will want to consider further the implications of your ruling and considerations of change in the compilation of the Register of Members' Interests, is it not plain, Mr. Speaker, that the resolution of those important questions requires that a statement be made now by the Prime Minister, and that it is right and relevant for her to do so?

Mr. Speaker: I must say to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and other hon. Members who have raised points of order that I went into this matter as the House would expect me to go into it—with immense care. It is my duty to uphold the rules of the House as they are. My statement was based squarely upon the Register of Members' Interests and the nine specific classifications under which hon. Members are required to register their interests. I do not believe that there would be any merit in my making a statement beyond that. Those are the rules as they exist. I believe that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) said that if the House wishes to change the rules it has the remedy in its hands.

Mr. Ioan Evans (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It can do so. It is my duty to uphold the rules as they are.

There is a distinction between the Register of Members' Interests and ministerial register. I regret that I know nothing about the latter, as I have never been a Minister. It is not for me to interpret it, nor have I any knowledge of what those interests are. I cannot go further than I have gone today.

Mr. Ioan Evans (Cynon Valley): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that when the matter was first raised, reference was made to *The Observer* article in which allegations were made against the Prime Minister, that her son was involved in financial dealings. You, and later the Leader of the House, said that there would be other opportunities for this matter to be raised in the House.

Can you advise us, Mr. Speaker, how the matter can be raised? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) has said, it is the Prime Minister who is responsible for the conduct of Ministers. Yet questions have been put to the Prime Minister and she has repeatedly refused to answer the allegations, which as far as we know, may be wrong. The fact that she is not willing to deny the allegations makes everyone think that there is something in them. Will you give us a ruling on how we can raise this matter in the House so that the Prime Minister can make a statement to clear up the position?

Mr. Speaker: It is not my function to advise hon. Members on tactics. I am sure that many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mr. Evans) who has been a Member for as long as I have, know that there are numerous opportunities to raise these matters on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. In making your remarks to the House you did not reply specifically to the grounds for my new point

of order—that there was a difference between what I submitted today and my case to you the other day, when we were referring specifically to parliamentary questions. Today's point of order relates to a parliamentary answer or perhaps a statement. Will you consider accepting my application and returning to the House in a few days with a view to commenting upon the way I have sought to differentiate between those two different parliamentary terms?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter of interpretation. I shall look carefully at the hon. Members points. On Thursday, the hon. Member asked me a different question. He is now distinguishing between what is an answer to a question and what is a parliamentary statement. As far as I know, it has never been the practice of Mr. Speaker or the House to call on hon. Members to declare an interest at Question Time, but I accept that it is occasionally done. I have heard some hon. Members say that they represent a union or that they have an interest in some type of company. The main register of interests is kept in the Register of Members' interests, the latest edition being 17 January 1983. I shall examine what the hon. Member has said, but I do not believe that I can add much to what I have already said today.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. It might be helpful to the House if the Leader of the House, after time for consideration, were to make a statement to the House on the rules relating to ministerial conduct.

Mr. Speaker: If the Leader of the House is not prepared or anxious to do so, there is nothing I can do about it. I can go no further than I have on this matter today.

Orders of the Day

Data Protection Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department Mr. Leon Brittan: I beg to move, that the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is, in fact, the second occasion within a year that the Second Reading of a Data Protection Bill has been moved in this House. I do not deny that it is a fairly formidable Bill. It deals with an intrinsically difficult subject which is further complicated by technical matters with which many of us will not be familiar. If I may say so, however, we should not be put off by that. The aims of the Bill are, I think, clear and straightforward and indeed common ground to hon. Members on both sides of the House. We do not have to be experts in computer technology, or fluent in the jargon of mainframes and minis and micros and optical character readers, to understand the implications of the Bill for the protection of the individual and the enhancement of his rights. I hope, therefore, that hon. Members will not allow the apparently technical nature of the subject matter to obscure the importance of the Bill as a protection both for individuals and for the business community.

First, I should put the Bill in context. Within the last decade—indeed, within the last couple of years—technology has advanced in ways which are bewildering to the layman. Yet it is increasingly coming to have a direct effect on all of us. Developments which, until recently, were in the realms of remote scientific theory are now of clear practical application. More and more office workers operate what is known as the “electronic office”. Employees are now used to their personnel departments holding staff records on computer. Hon. Members will be familiar with the facilities of the computerised information system run by the Library. Commerce, industry and the Government are performing an ever-increasing number of tasks with the use of information technology of some kind or other. Wherever we look its impact can be seen, and it is clearly here to stay.

This is an area in which Britain is in the vanguard of technical developments and application and one in which, with demand ever increasing, there are great opportunities. Inevitably, however, with the benefits come also disadvantages and dangers. Above all, developments in information technology have revealed how easily and rapidly information can be manipulated, collated, transferred and retrieved, and that information may include sensitive personal information. It is entirely understandable, therefore, that the proliferation of the technology has led to a certain unease and that there is some anxiety that personal information is collected about us all from unknown sources, stored in data banks and used for all sorts of purposes of which we are unaware.

Concern about the potential threat from computers is real but I must stress that the threat is still primarily a potential one. Actual instances of abuse, though not unknown, are still few and far between. In my view, the important thing is to guard against abuse in the future and eliminate the concern that might otherwise grow into a real impediment to the use of the technology.

[The Secretary of State for the Home Department]

This joint aim of protecting the citizen while actively encouraging the use of the computer has been shared by successive Governments. It was a Labour Government who set up the Lindop committee in 1976 to advise on legislation. Without that committee's acute analysis of the complexities of the problem, legislation would have been well-nigh impossible. In 1981, this Government committed themselves to legislation and followed that up with the first Data Protection Bill published in December 1982.

It is not only in this country, of course, that concern has been felt. As long ago as 1968 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe addressed a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers expressing concern about whether, in the context of automated data banks, the European convention on the protection of human rights and the domestic law of member states provided adequate protection for personal privacy. This recommendation led to others and ultimately to the European convention on data protection, which was opened for signature in 1981 and which the United Kingdom has signed but cannot ratify until we have our own legislation in place. The OECD has also been active in this area, producing a set of guidelines governing the protection of privacy and trans-border flows of personal data which the United Kingdom endorsed in 1981.

This international concern adds a new dimension. Business depends more and more on the free flow of data—often personal data—between countries. This free flow of information must continue if business is to flourish. At the same time, however, the threat to the individual becomes potentially greater when data are used not only at home but in other countries and in circumstances over which the subject, and often the person passing on the information, has little control. In recognition of this, the convention and the guidelines both confirm the right of countries which have introduced data protection safeguards to restrict the flow of personal data to other countries which do not offer comparable protection.

Ratification of the Council of Europe convention is therefore of prime importance on two grounds. First, it will reassure people in this country that when computers are used for the storage and use of personal data there are special safeguards for individual privacy which are well up to the international standard.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): I have been following with interest the Home Secretary's comments about protection of individual privacy, but is not the Bill dangerously deficient in protecting the individual against the ever-increasing power of the state in view of the exemptions built into the Bill freeing the Government from restrictions?

Mr. Brittan: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, but, as he will expect, I shall have a good deal to say about the exemptions later in my speech. I was seeking first to explain the background and purposes of steps which will enable us to ratify the Council of Europe convention.

As I said, ratification is important for two reasons. First, it will reassure people in this country that when computers are used for the storage and use of personal data there are special safeguards for individual privacy which are well up to the international standard. Secondly,

ratification will gain us membership of what one might call the European data protection club, thus ensuring a very important commercial interest—that British firms are not placed at a disadvantage in relation to firms in other European countries.

The Bill is therefore aimed at furthering the interests of two groups: on the one hand, the individual about whom data are held, the "data subject" in the jargon, and, on the other hand, the holder of information, the "data user" in the jargon. Yet clearly the interests of the two may not always coincide. Every safeguard for the subject is a potential burden to the user. Throughout our consideration of the Bill, therefore, it will be vital to remember the need to achieve a reasonable balance, ensuring that the rights of individuals as data subjects are properly protected, without imposing unreasonable burdens on the data users who collect and process personal data.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend will clarify certain specific aspects at an early stage. I apologise if he intended to deal with these matters later in his speech, but that may well not be the case.

Many hon. Members and many members of the public have acquired credit cards. That means that details will be in a data bank somewhere. Two bits of information will be available there: first, the value of the spending and thus how wealthy the person is in general; and, secondly, whether the person is a good or a bad credit risk. Under the legislation, will it be possible for a company to pass information to a subsidiary or associated company, or indeed to a completely different company, either about the credit risk, thus preventing someone who is a bad credit risk from doing business with the other company, or about heavy spending, so that other companies can get in on the gravy train? Like Members of Parliament, many members of the public are inundated with vast piles of junk mail which we could well do without. Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on that?

Mr. Brittan: I think that the answers will become clear if my hon. Friend will allow me to develop and explain what the Bill does and does not do. I should make it clear that anything that the Bill does is done by way of conferring rights on individuals and placing limitations on data users which at present do not exist. The only question is how wide the rights should be and how severe the limitations—that is to say, what the balance should be. At the moment the field is clear for the transmission of information and rights to protection against this do not exist. The principles about which my hon. Friend is concerned will become clearer as I continue. The Bill aims to strike a reasonable balance within the constraints of the convention, ratification of which must be the central target of the legislation.

At the heart of the scheme established by the Bill lie the data protection principles, the office of the Data Protection Registrar and the public register of data users. Briefly, subject to one or two exceptions, the Bill requires all those who process personal data automatically to register as data users and to set out in the public register certain details of their operation. The role of the Registrar is then to see that they comply with the eight data protection principles which set the standards for the collection, storage and use of personal data.

Already I have touched on two general areas of concern which have been the subject of much debate in the past and

Register of Interests

1. Mc STONE to see
2. PA
MS

NOTES:

- i. For details of the information which is required to be registered, see the Report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests (Declaration), especially paragraphs 12 to 28.
- ii. If there is not enough space on this form for the information needed, other papers can be attached to it; but each such paper should carry the Member's signature.

Name RT HON MRS MARGARET THATCHER

Constituency FINCHLEY

Registrable Interest	Details
* 1 Remunerated directorships of companies, public or private	NONE
* 2 Remunerated employments or offices	NONE
* 3 Remunerated trades, professions or vocations	NONE
4 The names of clients when the interests referred to above include personal services by the Member which arise out of or are related in any manner to his membership of the House	NONE

* In Items 1, 2 and 3 remuneration includes taxable expenses, allowances or benefits.

PTO

Declarable Interest	Details
<p>5 Financial sponsorships a as a Parliamentary candidate where to the knowledge of the Member the sponsorship in any case exceeds 25 per cent of the candidate's election expenses, or b as a Member of Parliament by any person or organisation, stating whether any such sponsorship includes any payment to the Member or any material benefit or advantage direct or indirect</p>	NONE
<p>6 Overseas visits relating to or arising out of membership of the House where the cost of any such visit has not been wholly borne by the Member or by public funds</p>	<p>As Leader of the Conservative Party since 1975 I have visited on behalf of and at the expense of the Conservative Party the following countries: Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Pakistan, Romania, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, USA, Yugoslavia. <i>Within the country, hospitality has been provided by the host-government or the British Embassy.</i></p>
<p>7 Any payments or any material benefits or advantages received from or on behalf of foreign Governments, organisations or persons</p>	NONE
<p>8 Land and property of a substantial value or from which a substantial income is derived</p>	NONE
<p>9 The names of companies or other bodies in which the Member to his knowledge has, either himself or with or on behalf of his spouse and infant children, a beneficial interest in shareholdings of a nominal value greater than one-hundredth of the issued share capital</p>	NONE

Signature

Margaret W. Thatcher

21ST May 1979