



JH 14/12

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

14 December 1983

Dear Willie,

DEPARTMENTAL SELECT COMMITTEES

As colleagues will be aware, there has already been considerable delay over the reappointment of the Departmental Select Committees. This has arisen from dissatisfaction with the representation proposed for the minor Opposition parties by the Committee of Selection.

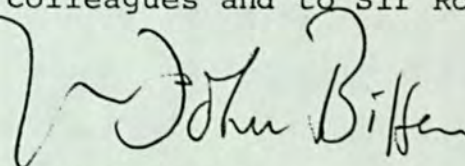
The membership of eight of the fourteen Departmental Select Committees was agreed to by the House last Friday. But there are still six to be set up, those on Agriculture; Defence; Education, Science and Arts; Employment; Social Services; and Welsh Affairs.

Following discussions through the usual channels it seems that the best hope of resolving the differences over these remaining six committees would be to increase the number of members of those committees at present with nine members to eleven members. This will give greater room for manoeuvre in allocating places between the minor Opposition parties. I understand John Wakeham has already spoken to the Ministers in charge of the four Departments concerned (Agriculture; Education, Science and Arts; Employment; and Social Services).

It is intended that the necessary Motions should be debated on Wednesday night. At the same time the opportunity is being taken to propose the amendment of the relevant Standing Order (SO 99) to take account of two minor recommendations concerned with facilitating co-operation (joint meetings and availability of evidence etc) between the work of Departmental Select Committees. These were made by the Liaison Committee last session in their First Report, and the Government is committed to their acceptance by the reply to the Report given in my letter to Edward Du Cann of 27 April.

If any points are raised in the debate about any of the other recommendations made in the Liaison Committee's Report - for example, on the question of further sub-committees - I propose to say no more than that the main concern at present is to get the Departmental Select Committees re-established as soon as possible and to see how they go before considering any further changes.

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



JOHN BIFFEN

Viscount Whitelaw CH MC
Lord President of the Council

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