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Ref. A083/1311

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister

Agree to the establishment of,
this Committee and to its membership.
The Chancellor of the Exchequer's participation
will be crucial. One wonders whether with
one or two other members of the Cabinet ~~seats~~
near London would be able to help with
it.

Election Business Committee

FERB 9.5

On the announcement of an Election it has been customary since 1923 to appoint this Cabinet Committee. Its main function is to provide the means whereby enquiries from Party Headquarters are referred to Departments for advice, meeting the legitimate need of Government party candidates for accurate information from Whitehall sources and avoiding civil servants generally from becoming involved with the party organisation. It can also, as necessary, provide advice on the response to enquiries from other candidates, pressure groups and members of the public.

2. The experience of recent Elections suggests that it would probably not be necessary for the Committee to meet, but the Ministers appointed should be reasonably available in case it has to. In particular, it would clearly be helpful if it were chaired by a senior Minister who was readily available to be consulted as issues arose. Thus previous Committees have usually been chosen from Peers and MPs with constituencies near London. In the February 1974 Election it consisted of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eccles (then Paymaster General), Sir Geoffrey Howe (then Minister for Trade and Consumer Affairs) and Lord Windlesham (then Lord Privy Seal). I suggest that you might consider inviting the Lord Chancellor to chair the Committee again this time, and that the other members might be:-

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Lord Privy Seal

Secretary of State for Trade

3. I suggest that the Committee's terms of reference, as in the February 1974 Election, should be:-

"To provide a forum for the clearance of statements of policy by the Government; to co-ordinate, as appropriate, comments from Departments on the guidance prepared for the use of Government party candidates in dealing with enquiries put to them during

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the Election campaign; and to consider replies by Departments to similar enquiries from Opposition party candidates, organisations and members of the public".

4. Subject to your agreement, I would propose to circulate at once, as is customary, a Cabinet memorandum announcing the establishment of the Committee, to which would be annexed a note to be issued to all Departments giving ^{standard} guidance on the submission of matters to the Committee and on the handling of constituency correspondence during the campaign. A draft is attached.

Agreed - will
clear at school
tomorrow
mt

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

9 May 1983

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10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Action business committee

To remind you to mention
this at Cabinet.

Membership and terms of
reference highlighted.

FERB

For information

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~~SECRET~~
PS FCO
PS TSY
PS PARLY
PS HOME

Cabinet Office, ~~PS~~ DIARY
70 Whitehall,
London SW1A 2AS

17 May 1983

PS(83) 12

Dear Private Secretary,

General Election: Election Business Committee

The terms of reference and composition of the Election Business Committee were set out in C(P)(83)1 and further guidance was contained in my letter of 10 May (PS(83)6). I am now writing to inform you that the Prime Minister has invited the Secretary of State for Industry to serve as an additional member of the Committee.

I am copying this letter to Private Secretaries to members of the Cabinet, the Law Officers and the Chief Whip. I should be grateful if recipients would ensure that this information is made available to all concerned within their Departments.

Yours sincerely,

R P HATFIELD

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