

NJS o/R

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Minister.

PRIME MINISTER

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

As I told you, there were lengthy exchanges in the House this afternoon after you had left about what you had meant by saying on Tuesday that you would be prepared to answer "any Question", and what might be done to improve the balance of Prime Minister's Question time.

You said when we talked afterwards that you wanted to widen the scope of Prime Minister's questions, and you suggested that you might offer to answer literally any Question that was put to you.

Mr. St. John Stevas was asked in the House to provide a statement on Monday about what was intended. Mr. Callaghan bumped into me after all this had happened and said that he hoped that there would be some early clarification. He added that he had thought that you had meant on Tuesday that you would be prepared to answer any supplementary which was put to you - and I am sure that he put this suggestion to me as a way out if you want to take it.

You asked me to look into the history of Prime Minister's Questions and to let you have some more information about what had happened in the past. I should not conceal from you that in so doing I am drawing heavily on <sup>(factual)</sup> advice which was given to Mr. Callaghan in 1977, which was the last time when an experiment with the format of Prime Minister's Questions was made. The conclusion which I draw from the papers I have looked at, and the consultations I have been able to make with my predecessors and others, is that you would be well advised not to go beyond the formula which was adopted on that occasion. It is set out as an annex to the Report of the Sessional Committee on Procedure and is at Flag A. You will see and remember that Mr. Callaghan offered to take a larger number of substantive Questions while reserving the right to decide which ones he

/would transfer.



would transfer. He undertook to enter into the spirit of this offer and expressed the hope that Members would do the same.

As you will also remember, the result was not a success. Our records indicate that you yourself disliked the change because it was accompanied by the Speaker being more restrictive about the number of supplementaries he called to indirect Questions. The system was therefore allowed to lapse and we have got to where we are now.

I do think that it would be unwise to move from the present position to giving carte blanche to Members to ask whatever they like, for several different reasons. The first is that it would open up obvious opportunities for them to invite you to override departmental Ministers on points which properly ought to go to them. The second is that you would find yourself subject to a barrage of detailed constituency Questions which had not been referred to departmental Ministers, but were put straight to you. The third is that it would open up the opportunity for the Opposition to table large numbers of Questions each week on a topic of the greatest possible embarrassment to the Government, thereby ensuring that Question time was as difficult an occasion as it possibly could be. The fourth is that Members might well table very large numbers of written Questions to you on all topics under the sun.

I attach a separate note setting out some of the history of all this. You will see from it that these issues have been raised a number of times in the past, and that no satisfactory solution has ever been found. I would counsel against going the whole hog immediately; and would suggest instead that you might make it known that you would be prepared to answer a wider range of Questions but not those which manifestly were inappropriate for the Prime Minister to answer.

If you wanted to follow such a course, you could announce it by making a short statement yourself which could be followed

/immediately



immediately by an amplification by the Speaker. But before doing so, we would have to give some thought to the question of whether we should consult the Opposition and give them prior notice of your intentions.

I would be very glad to discuss all of this with you.

MS

5 July 1979



THE RECENT HISTORY OF PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

X) There is a good deal of information on this topic in the 1977 Report of the Sessional Committee. I think it is also worth letting you have an extract from a paper which was prepared for your predecessor, on which I cannot improve:

For many years Prime Minister's Questions began at Question No. 45. In 1960, it was decided to take them at No. 40. In 1961 this system was abandoned in favour of Prime Minister's Questions being taken at a specific time - at 3.15 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Before the early 1950s, the Prime Minister answered Questions on any of the first four days of the week, though Questions were answered on his behalf if he was not in the House. But Sir Winston Churchill decided in the early 1950s that in general - there were exceptions - he would not go to the House to answer Questions except on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This practice was adopted by his successors, and was recognised in the changes agreed in 1961 when, in return for Prime Minister's Questions coming on at 3.15 p.m. without fail on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Questions to him on other days were to be given no priority whatsoever on the Order Paper.

Looking back over the experience of the last thirty years, there has been a profound change in the nature of Prime Minister's Question time. To illustrate the old system, and the kind of Questions which were taken in the past, we have arbitrarily taken Prime Minister's Questions for periods of three Parliamentary weeks in February 1948, February 1953, February 1956 and February 1959. Copies of these oral exchanges are at Flab B, in case you wish to look at them to get the flavour. Insofar as it is possible to draw conclusions, I think one can say that:

- (i) there were far fewer Questions (for instance Churchill answered 11 Questions in 3 weeks, at a time when Questions which were not reached accumulated for the next Question time);

/(ii)



- (ii) but they were substantive Questions which in general related to the Prime Minister's own activities and responsibilities;
- (iii) there was perhaps a greater willingness for the Prime Minister to accept "marginal" Questions which would have been transferred by later Prime Ministers to the responsible departmental Minister, particularly so far as foreign affairs were concerned. This - though not so much with Attlee - may have reflected the tendency of Churchill, Eden and MacMillan to concentrate their attention on foreign affairs and, indeed, Britain's greater prominence in world affairs. But the Prime Minister was able to be relatively more relaxed about accepting Questions because Members did not in general attempt to abuse the system and seek to hold the Prime Minister responsible for all aspects of his administration, which is implicit in the attitude of some Members now; and
- (iv) in general, Prime Minister's Question time was not used simply to score points off the other side in the way it is now.

But already by 1959 there were signs of significant change which by the early 1960s were well established. These changes in Prime Minister's Questions have come not so much from different procedures as new attitudes in the House to Question time, though they were possibly facilitated by the change to regular times for Prime Minister's Questions in 1961. Prime Minister's Question time became an integral part of the party battle in the House and one of the main, possibly the principal, occasions for the gladiatorial battle between the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister. This change meant that the main aim of Prime Minister's Question time ceased to be to seek information of statements of Government policy but to score points off the other side.

This new role for Prime Minister's Question time has had political significance because it is the principal means by which a Prime Minister can show mastery over the Opposition and its Leader - or vice-versa - and this in turn has an influence on the Parliamentary standing of the Government, the morale of its backbenchers and so on. But it has also led to the Prime Minister's Question time becoming unsatisfactory in the eyes of many. Complaints are made about the difficulty of putting down to the Prime Minister substantive Questions which are not subsequently transferred, the resulting prevalence of



"formula" Questions which bear little relation to the MP's real Question which he will put in his supplementary, the use of Questions merely to score points and slow progress made in Question time.

Various Select Committees on Procedure have considered the problems associated with Question time. They have not often addressed themselves to the specific problem of Prime Minister's Question time; the most recent and extensive consideration was given by the Select Committee in 1971/72 (a copy of the relevant part of the report is at Flag C). The Committee made no proposals which would have significantly changed the system, and your predecessors have not volunteered any such changes.





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

9 July 1979

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

You told me this morning that you thought it likely that the Chancellor of the Duchy will be asked in the House this afternoon about the format of Prime Minister's Question Time, given the comments made by Members last Thursday and his commitment to convey those views to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister would have come to the House this afternoon herself, but will not be able to do so because she will be attending the funeral of John Davies. She would be content for the Chancellor of the Duchy, if pressed, to say that:

"The Prime Minister is prepared to answer a larger number of substantive, as opposed to indirect, oral questions if hon. Members wish to table them. She will therefore accept such questions if they are ones that can reasonably be addressed to her. She will, however, transfer to the responsible Minister any substantive oral questions which ought by their nature to go to a Departmental Minister - such as detailed individual cases".

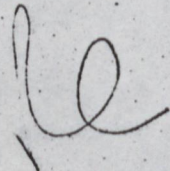
I am sure that the Prime Minister will have to deal with this topic herself tomorrow, and she is willing to do so. It would be best if the Chancellor of the Duchy did not go too far into the details of what the Prime Minister is prepared to do, given that she will have to give them tomorrow.

Please let me know if you would like further guidance.

I have already told the Clerk at the Table of the Prime Minister's views, and he has undertaken to pass them on to the Speaker.

I am copying this letter to Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office).

N. J. SANDERS



John Stevens, Esq.,  
Office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.



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PUBLIC SERVICES  
PERSONNEL (TRAINING)

45. Viscountess Davidson asked the Prime Minister, in view of the responsibilities which have been undertaken by the Government, under the Education Act, the Health Act, the Children's Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill, now under discussion, what steps the Ministries of Health and Education and the Home Office are taking to secure the training at Universities and other teaching centres for adequate personnel to work the Acts.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee): The considerable expansion in the capacity of Universities, which has already taken place and will continue in the future, is designed to secure an adequate supply of graduates in various fields of employment, including the public services. Measures have also been taken for increasing training facilities, for example, through the emergency training scheme for teachers and the Ministry of Health's Scheme for post-graduate medical, including specialist, education and courses for training nurses, sanitary inspectors, physiotherapy teachers and remedial gymnasts. Special courses at Universities and other centres are available for child care workers and probation officers, and it is intended to arrange other courses later.

Mr. Kenneth Lindsay: Could the right Gentleman pass on to the Lord President of the Council the importance of encouraging the social sciences, as well as the physical sciences, because a number of courses in Bills which are now being considered will be inoperative unless we have an even larger number of these trained people?

The Prime Minister: I am sure my right Friend was listening intently.

Lieut. Commander Gurney Braithwaite: What is a remedial gymnast; does he differ in any way from any other gymnast?

The Prime Minister: I think he is very different indeed.

Mr. George Thomas: Would the Prime Minister also bear in mind the necessity for much further financial assistance for those who are going into the medical profession, in order that this shall not be a dead shop so far as children of working people are concerned?

The Prime Minister: That is another question, which should be addressed to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Health.



4 FEB 1948

**MEMORIAL SCROLL  
(DUPLICATES)**

45. **Mr. Lipson** asked the Prime Minister if he is aware that the memorial scroll granted to the next-of-kin of a member of the forces killed in the World War of 1939-45 is issued to the widow of the deceased, if there is a widow; that, in such circumstances, the parents have no claim; that this has given rise to some disappointment; and whether he will reconsider the matter.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee):** I have recently had the problem examined and approval has now been given to a recommendation for the issue of a duplicate Scroll in such circumstances to parents who notify the Ministry of Pensions of their desire to receive this.

**Mr. Lipson:** Is the Prime Minister aware that the action which he has taken is very much appreciated?



THURS 12 FEB 1948

MON 16 FEB 1948

### SCIENTISTS AND TECHNICIANS (GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS)

45. **Mr. Ellis Smith** asked the Prime Minister to what extent an investigation is made into the political records of scientists, technicians and engineers before appointments are made in Government factories; what is the purpose of the investigation; and how far M.I. 5 is involved in the investigation or consideration before the appointments are made.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee):** I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Haire) on the 5th February.

**Mr. Gallacher:** Can the Prime Minister give the number of people employed under the direction of M.I. 5—is it 10,000 or 30,000?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Member must not draw on his experiences of another country.

### CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION

46. **Mr. De la Bère** asked the Prime Minister whether he will consider setting up a Royal Commission for the purpose of conducting a research into the operations of the Central Office of Information on parallel lines to the inquiry that is being conducted by the Royal Commission on the Press.

**The Prime Minister:** No, Sir.

**Mr. De la Bère:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this is not merely a question of what is sauce for the goose being sauce for the gander? Is he aware that an appalling amount of public money has been expended and is being expended by the Central Office of Information?

**The Prime Minister:** Obviously, it is a bird of quite a different feather of which the hon. Gentleman has now got hold.

### PRODUCTION (RESTRICTIVE PRACTICES)

45. **Mr. Lipson** asked the Prime Minister if he has discussed with the T.U.C. the abolition of restrictive practices in view of increasing production; and what progress has been made to bring this about.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee):** I presume that the hon. Member's Question refers to practices covered by the Restoration of Pre-War Trade Practices Act, 1942. This matter has been discussed by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of Labour and National Service, with the National Joint Advisory Council, and on their recommendation the fixing of the appointed day under the Act has been deferred until the 31st December, 1948.

**Mr. Lipson:** Are there not other restrictive practices delaying production, and would it not be just as well to discuss them too, in view of the necessity to increase production and the needs of the time?

**The Prime Minister:** Perhaps the hon. Member will put down a Question on that to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Labour?

### MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (SALARIES)

46. **Mr. Hugh Fraser** asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the Government's recent appeals to both sides of industry to forgo their claims to higher salaries, wages and profits, and as a lead and example, he will propose to the members of this House a general or proportionate reduction of their salaries or emoluments.

**The Prime Minister:** No, Sir. It is no part of the policy laid down in the White Paper to reduce wages or salaries.

**Mr. Fraser:** Surely the Prime Minister is aware that it is asking for something like a miracle to happen on both sides of industry to expect prices to come down? Surely in that case something in the nature of an act of faith is necessary from his House to encourage the country? If prices do come down, then no one will be any the worse off.

**Mr. Stanley Prescott:** Is it not a fact that there is no obligation on any hon. Member to draw his full remuneration, unless he so desires?



MON 19 FEB 1948

**CENTRAL OFFICE OF  
INFORMATION**

19/2

45. Mr. De la Bère asked the Prime Minister on which aspects of the work of the Central Office of Information he answers in this House, and on which aspects questions should be addressed to the Lord President of the Council and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee):** As I explained in my statement of 7th March, 1946, my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council is charged with general supervision of the machinery which was set up to secure the proper integration of the information policy of Departments and to co-ordinate inter-departmental action both at home and overseas. Treasury Ministers are responsible to Parliament for the Vote of the Central Office of Information, and also deal with matters affecting the staffing, efficiency and methods of the Office. Publicity policy on the other hand is the responsibility of the Departmental Minister concerned in each case.

**Mr. De la Bère:** Will the Prime Minister impress on his right hon. Friend the urgent need to separate the world of fact from the world of sham, and is he further aware that the C.O.I. urgently needs a complete overhaul?

**The Prime Minister:** In reply to the first part of the supplementary question my right hon. Friend is very well aware of the distinction. As to the second part, I do not agree with the hon. Member.



10TH FEBRUARY 1953

**NATIONAL SERVICE  
(GOVERNMENT POLICY)**

45. **Mr. Shinwell** asked the Prime Minister whether the Government have considered a review of the National Service Acts, particularly with a view to a reduction in the period of service.

46. **Mr. Yates** asked the Prime Minister if he is aware that the National Service Act comes to an end during 1953; and if he will take steps to review the obligation of, and the need for, compulsory National Service, with a view to its eventual abolition.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill):** Questions on the National Service Acts should normally be addressed to the Minister of Labour and National Service, but as these two Questions raise major issues of policy I will deal with them myself. No reduction in the period of National Service can be contemplated at the present time.

**Mr. Shinwell:** In view of the fact, which no doubt the right hon. Gentleman recognises, that the Acts come to an end before the end of this year, are the Government undertaking a review of the position? When will they be in a position to make an announcement on the subject?

**The Prime Minister:** The future policy on National Service will be dealt with on the White Paper on Defence which it is hoped will be published next week. Thereafter there will be a defence debate in which the whole matter can be raised.

**Mr. Shinwell:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his statement. Do I understand from what he has just said that in the Defence White Paper the Government will state their intentions about the National Service Acts?

**The Prime Minister:** I thought that the right hon. Gentleman would like to be reassured upon that subject. I said that there will be no change, and that no reduction in the period of National Service can be contemplated at the present time.

**Mr. Yates:** Is the Prime Minister aware that when the period of National Service was increased to two years a specific promise was made to the House that it would be reduced as soon as practicable and that it was not to be regarded as a feature of the British way of life? Does he not think that the country is entitled to adequate notice in order that this matter can be reviewed, and would it not, in accordance with his own policy, be an excellent step towards setting the people free by removing the shackles of conscription?

**The Prime Minister:** I cannot think of anything that would be more disastrous for us than at this moment to reduce the two years' period of National Service. I am sure it would spread despondency throughout free Europe and would make even more difficult than they are many of our relations with the United States.

**Mr. Shinwell:** But regarding the problem solely from the standpoint of military expediency, and not looking at it as a matter of principle, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he did not say in October of last year that a third world war seemed unlikely, and in view of that statement is there not some reason for reviewing the position and bringing about a possible reduction in the period?

**The Prime Minister:** No, Sir. If it be true, as we all earnestly hope, that the danger of a third world war has receded—and that is a matter which no one can declare with certitude—it is largely due to the exertions made by this country, by the United States and by our allies in Europe to place ourselves in a position of defence; and if at what may be a critical and delicate moment in world history we were suddenly to make a pull-back of this kind, it might do harm far outside anything we can think of.



12TH FEBRUARY 1953

**INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS**

Mr. Dodds asked the Prime Minister, following his visit to the United States of America, he will now endeavour to arrange a meeting with Joseph Stalin in an effort to lessen the tension in international affairs.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill): I have nothing to add to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member

for South Ayrshire (Mr. Emrys Hughes) on Monday, 9th February.

**Mr. Dodds:** But that is not good enough. Does the Prime Minister recall the banner headlines of the "Evening Standard" which read:

"Talks with Stalin call transforms the Election"?

Has the right hon. Gentleman no desire to keep faith with the millions of people who believe in his sincerity? Does he not by now appreciate that if he is to have any restraining influence on the present American Administration, he will have to have a more independent mind and have a talk with Stalin?

**The Prime Minister:** I have nothing to add to the reply which I have just given to the hon. Member.



18TH FEBRUARY 1953

## ANGLO-FRENCH TALKS

45. Mr. Wyatt asked the Prime Minister whether he will make a statement on his recent official conversations with the Prime Minister of France.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a statement to the House on the subject of these conversations on 16th of February, to which I do not desire to add.

Mr. Wyatt: Has the Prime Minister seen a report in "The Times" today which makes it quite clear that the fear of the French Government, and indeed that of the European Army, depends upon the answers which his Government give to the French proposals for a closer association with the European Army? Will he not remember that he himself invented the idea of the European Army at Strasbourg and suggested that I should be a member of it? Will he not summon forth the imagination which caused him once to suggest union with the French nation?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman seems to be more desirous of imparting information than of receiving it. Anyhow, I have nothing to give him.

18TH FEBRUARY 1953

SOUTH-EAST ASIA  
(DEFENCE PACT)

46. Mr. Wyatt asked the Prime Minister whether he has any further statement to make on the association of Britain with other members of the Australian, New Zealand and United States defence pact for the defence of South-East Asia.

The Prime Minister: Not at the present time.

Mr. Wyatt: Has the right hon. Gentleman made it clear to the United States Government that it is quite intolerable that there should be a defence pact with New Zealand and Australia in Canada and South-East Asia from which this country, which is bound to go to war if either of those nations is attacked, is excluded?

The Prime Minister: I do not think I ought to embark upon a complicated discussion of this kind at Question Time. The hon. Gentleman will find that a great deal of this matter was settled by the Government of which he was, I believe, a Member.

Mr. Wyatt: Why cannot the right hon. Gentleman give us some information? If we are not to get it at Question Time, when can we get it, if we do not have a debate on the subject?

The Prime Minister: A great deal of information is given out in the House of

Commons from time to time, and I do not see why any complaint should be made on that subject.



230 FEBRUARY 1953

#### DESERTERS (CORONATION AMNESTY)

45. Sir T. Moore asked the Prime Minister whether he will recommend a general amnesty to war-time deserters in connection with the Coronation celebrations.

46. Lieut.-Colonel Lipton asked the Prime Minister whether he will now consider the question of an amnesty for deserters.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill): Her Majesty's Government have decided that, in the circumstances referred to by the hon. and gallant Member for Ayr and as a special measure which will not be regarded as a precedent for the future, there will be no further

considerations of members of the Armed Forces who deserted from the Services between 3rd September, 1939, and 15th August, 1945. Men who wish to take advantage of the amnesty will be required to report themselves in writing to a Service authority. They will then receive a production certificate and will be transferred to the appropriate Reserve to which men were transferred on demobilisation. Men who claim the benefit of the amnesty will not be prosecuted for offences consequential upon desertion, such as subsequent fraudulent enlistment, or the possession of identity documents in a false name, but the amnesty will not cover other offences against the criminal law.

Full details will be announced in due course of the steps which men will be required to take and of the consequential measures which will be applied to men who have been convicted of desertion and are still serving, but any men who are awaiting trial or serving sentences for desertion during the 1939-45 war will be released from custody.

Sir T. Moore: Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that though this generous decision will, I suppose, be welcomed with mixed feelings throughout the country, it will, at the same time, restore thousands of men once again to family and community life and thereby, perhaps, give them an opportunity to justify this clemency?

Lieut.-Colonel Lipton: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that while his statement today—which is much more satisfactory than the answer he gave me on 29th January, 1952—will require a little study, it will be appreciated by all those who have long felt that this eight-year old man hunt should have come to an end long since?

Mr. Langford-Holt: Can my right hon. Friend say to how many men it is estimated that this amnesty will apply? His hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for War stated the other day that there were 10,000 deserters. Is it a fact that the numbers involved under this proposed act of clemency will be in the neighbourhood of only 2,000 to 3,000?

The Prime Minister: I should like notice of questions of detail.



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24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1953**FOOD PRODUCTION (PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH)**

45. **Mr. Emrys Hughes** asked the Prime Minister, in view of the importance of increasing food production in Britain, if he will publish a full report of his speech to the National Farmers' Union on 17th February as a White Paper.

**The Prime Minister:** It would be unusual to publish speeches in this way, but I am sending the hon. Member a copy of the speech he refers to.

**Mr. Hughes:** In view of the universal interest amongst farmers, and the gigantic target the Prime Minister set them, could he explain, for the benefit of the farmers, how they are going to achieve this very elastic target if men are taken away for military service?

**The Prime Minister:** If I were to attempt to do justice to that question I should be severely straining the usual procedure at Question time.

**Mr. Peart:** In view of reports of the Prime Minister's speech, will he instruct the Minister of Agriculture to produce a really positive agricultural policy, in view of the absence of one?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the Minister of Agriculture is doing extremely well. I am sure he does not need to take any advice from the party opposite.

**Mr. H. Morrison:** The Prime Minister is being very dictatorial.

24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1953

46. **Mr. Peart** asked the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to improve the organisation of his Government with a view to reaching their recently announced objective of 60 per cent. above pre-war food production.

**The Prime Minister:** This subject might well be appropriate to a debate on agriculture. No changes are proposed in the organisation of Her Majesty's Government.

**Mr. Peart:** Is the Prime Minister aware that, despite his previous answer, there is evidence that agriculture has not had the priority it should have had over the past 12 months, and would he, if the Minister of Agriculture is doing well, put him in the Cabinet, as the Minister of Agriculture was in the previous Administration?

**The Prime Minister:** I should be very glad to send the hon. Gentleman also a copy of the speech which I delivered, but I really could not undertake to accept his advice as to what Ministers should or should not be members of the Cabinet.

**Mr. Baldwin:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the most effective steps that can be taken to increase food production is to pass legislation to bring the common land of this country into cultivation to give more food, and, further, will he appoint a commission to go into the question of the 16 million to 17 million acres of rough grazing which exists in Great Britain?

**Mr. J. T. Price:** When the Prime Minister is considering this matter very fully, would he also consider the statement reported to have been made yesterday by a member of the Cabinet, namely, that economic planning was "all boloney" and either confirm that is his opinion or deny it?

**The Prime Minister:** I should prefer to have an agreed definition of the meaning of "boloney" before I attempted to deal with such a topic.



25TH FEBRUARY 1953

N.A.T.O.-A.N.Z.U.S.  
CO-ORDINATION

46. Mr. A. Henderson asked the Prime Minister whether he will make a statement on the steps taken to secure co-ordination between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Australian, New Zealand and United States Pact Organisation.

**The Prime Minister:** I am not in a position to make any statement on this subject at the present time.

**Mr. Henderson:** I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman has said, but has his attention been drawn to the public statement made only a few days ago by Lord Ismay, stressing the need for

co-ordination between these two international organisations and stating that the business of N.A.T.O. could only be done on a global basis? Would he agree that that is a correct statement of the position and may we take it that this suggestion is regarded as a matter of urgency and importance, even though the right hon. Gentleman cannot make a detailed statement today?

**The Prime Minister:** I have not yet seen the statement of Lord Ismay but, as read out by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, it sounds very good. I like it. These matters are being very carefully considered and I think there would be a very general consensus of opinion in this House on what we should like to happen. Whether it will happen or not, I cannot tell.

25TH FEBRUARY 1953

CORONATION OATH  
CHANGES

45. Mr. E. Fletcher asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the changes that were made in the Coronation oath in 1937, and in view of the further changes that have since been rendered necessary, he will before the Coronation introduce legislation to amend the Coronation Oath Act of 1689.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill):** As this answer is of some length, it would be convenient if I might with your permission and that of the House read it as a statement at the end of Questions.



1956

OFFICIAL REPORT:

VOLUME

COLUMN

13TH FEBRUARY 1956.

**WASHINGTON AND OTTAWA  
(DISCUSSIONS)**

45. Mr. Warbey asked the Prime Minister the outcome of his discussions with President Eisenhower regarding the suspension or limitation of hydrogen bomb tests.

**The Prime Minister (Sir Anthony Eden):** I would ask the hon. Gentleman to await the statement I shall be making in a few minutes.

**Mr. Warbey:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that he will deal adequately with this important matter in his statement? I ask him this because there was no mention of it at all in the communiqué and the declaration.

**The Prime Minister:** I am certainly not prepared to give any undertaking that the hon. Gentleman's definition of "adequately" and mine are the same.



14th February 1956

### NATIONALISED INDUSTRIES (PRICE STABILISATION)

51. Mr. Nabarro asked the Prime Minister, in view of the need for price stability, and the lead given in implementing this policy by recent pronouncements of private enterprise cement firms and one nationalised board, namely, the South of Scotland Electricity Board, whether he will now call a conference of the heads of nationalised boards, to be presided over by himself, with a view to evolving a price stabilisation formula and agreement, for all nationalised industries during 1956.

**The Prime Minister:** I hardly think that all the different conditions could be dealt with by a single formula or by the procedure my hon. Friend suggests.

**Mr. Nabarro:** Can my right hon. Friend say what response, if any, other than in the case of the one relatively minor nationalised concern, has been made to the appeal in his Bradford speech, for is it not manifest that until the nationalised industries, which are basic industries, make a contribution to his policy, nothing whatever can be achieved?

**The Prime Minister:** The investment requirements of the nationalised industries have, quite properly, been discussed with the heads of the nationalised industries, like other investment requirements. Although I understand the motive behind my hon. Friend's Question—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Yes, I do; it is a perfectly proper one—I do not think it will be possible to apply one flat and universal rule to all nationalised industries, which have very many differing features among them.

**Lieut.-Colonel Lipton:** Could not the Prime Minister, in addition to the nationalised industries referred to by the hon. Member for Kidderminster (Mr. Nabarro), have a look at British Petroleum, which is a nationalised industry, making a considerable profit, in which the Government have a majority holding of shares? Will he please have a look at that?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the Government are doing pretty well out of the shares.

14th February 1956

### INFLATION (CHANCELLOR'S SPEECH)

48. Mr. Lewis asked the Prime Minister whether the recent speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the National Production Advisory Council on Industry on the question of inflation represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend made it clear that the speech was a diagnosis and not a statement of policy.

**Mr. Lewis:** Is the Prime Minister aware of the fact that in that diagnosis the Chancellor stated that during 1954 retail prices rose  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times as fast as in the previous year, that imports rose by 15 per cent., which was three times as much as exports—[HON. MEMBERS: "Quoting."]—and that our reserves fell by about a quarter? Yes, I am quoting. Is the Prime Minister aware of the fact that the housewives want to see the hole in their purse mended, the hole in their husbands' pocket mended, and the pound really worth something? When will the Government do something about that?

**The Prime Minister:** I understand that there is shortly to be an economic debate, in which perhaps a repetition of the speech which we have just heard will be appropriate.



14TH FEBRUARY 1956

#### WASHINGTON DECLARATION

47 and 49. Mr. Zilliacus asked the Prime Minister (1) whether he will give the dates, titles and authors of the documents and manifestos in which, according to the Declaration of Washington, Communist rulers have announced their intention to spread Communism over the whole world by military, among other, means; and whether he will publish the relevant passages from these documents and manifestos as a White Paper;

(2) which are the peoples who, according to the Declaration of Washington, have been forcibly incorporated in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; the names of the ten once independent nations which, according to the Washington Declaration, are compelled to work for the aggrandisement of the Soviet State; and whether he will give an assurance that Her Majesty's Government will continue to conduct their relations with all the East and Central European Members of the United Nations consistently with the obligations of the United Nations Charter.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman has misquoted the Washington Declaration.

The hon. Member must be well aware of the facts of Communist doctrine and propaganda, and I see no need on this occasion to reproduce them all in a White Paper. The hon. Member must also be aware of the names of the former Baltic States and of the satellite States.

I can see no need for any further assurance that Her Majesty's Government will conduct themselves consistently with their obligations under the United Nations Charter.

**Mr. Zilliacus:** On the former point, may I ask if the Prime Minister denies that, according to the Declaration of Washington, numerous documents and manifestos exist in which the Communist leaders have proclaimed their intention to spread Communism throughout the world by military, among other, means? That is not an exact quotation, but that is the meaning of it. If the Prime Minister does deny that, will he also deny that such statements exist, because they do not exist? That is the first point.

**The Prime Minister:** I want to quote from the Declaration, and not from the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of it. What it says is slightly different, but very importantly different. Our Declaration says:

"The Communist rulers have expressed in numerous documents and manifestos their purpose to extend the practice of Communism by every possible means until it encompasses the world."

I think that is an accurate statement of fact. We then go on to say that to this end they have used military and political force in the past.

**Mr. Zilliacus:** Does "every possible means" include military means or not? That is what I want to know to begin with. On the second point, is it not a fact that under the Charter we are pledged to respect the territorial integrity and political independence of members of the United Nations, and not to interfere in their internal affairs? Is this an obligation which applies also to the States of Eastern Europe?

**The Prime Minister:** The world would be a considerably happier place if some for whom the hon. Gentleman is now protesting would follow the practice against which he is inveighing.

**Mr. Nicholson:** Is not this innocence and ignorance of otherwise intelligent people absolutely bewildering?

**Mr. Daines:** Does the Prime Minister recognise that Russian actions speak far louder than their words?



14 TH FEBRUARY 1956

46. Mr. Langford-Holt asked the Prime Minister what further steps he proposes to take to emphasise and secure the implementation of the Tripartite Agreement of 1950 on Israel.

The Prime Minister: I would refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made yesterday.

Mr. Langford-Holt: In view of the fact that the Prime Minister said yesterday that there was a danger that both sides did not fully understand the implications of the Tripartite Declaration—and anybody who has been out there clearly knows that there is a failure to understand—is my right hon. Friend able to say when the negotiations which he indicated yesterday are in progress between the signatories to the Declaration will be concluded?

The Prime Minister: No, I could not say that. There are discussions for the purposes which I described yesterday, and I have no reason to suppose that their conclusions will necessarily be made public.

Mr. Gaitskell: May I ask the Prime Minister whether it is his intention, possibly after consultation with the United States and France, to make any official reply to the statement of the Soviet Government on the Tripartite Declaration?

The Prime Minister: I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. His question does not actually arise from the Question on the Order Paper, but I will gladly consider it. Of course, I have not had an opportunity of consulting my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in detail on the matter, but I will certainly consider it.



14TH FEBRUARY 1956

## ISRAEL AND ARAB STATES

45. **Mr. A. Henderson** asked the Prime Minister whether he will make a statement on his attempts to bring about direct negotiations between Israel and her Arab neighbours; and whether such negotiations are now to take place.

**The Prime Minister (Sir Anthony Eden)**: I would refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the statement I made yesterday.

**Mr. Henderson**: In view of the statement issued by the Soviet Foreign Office and the allegations contained in it, would the Prime Minister make it clear that the policy of Her Majesty's Government in relation to the Middle East, including the 1950 Tripartite Declaration, is entirely consistent with the provisions of the United Nations Charter?

**The Prime Minister**: Yes, Sir; the declaration of 1950 is wholly in harmony with the terms of the United Nations Charter. In fact, so far as I know, I have never hitherto heard anybody cast doubt on that fact.

**Mr. Shinwell**: Does the Prime Minister appreciate that his statement yesterday in regard to the situation in the Middle East was not as clear as it ought to have been? Would he be good enough to state quite categorically whether it is the intention of the signatories to the Tripartite Declaration only to prepare to take action in the event of aggression—that is, after the event—or whether they propose to take any kind of positive action before an event takes place, in order to prevent it taking place—in other words, to prevent aggression?

**The Prime Minister**: So far as the 1950 Declaration is concerned, the right hon. Gentleman knows well that our position has been, remains and will be that we will carry out the terms of the 1950 Declaration. I do not think I can possibly go beyond that or put a gloss upon it.

16TH FEBRUARY 1956

## SECURITY (CONFERENCE OF PRIVY COUNCILLORS)

46. **Mr. Emrys Hughes** asked the Prime Minister what recommendations for economies in the cost of the security departments of the Foreign Office and other Government Departments have been made by the Conference of Privy Councillors that has been inquiring into security matters.

**The Prime Minister**: As I told the House on Monday, we are now considering the steps to be taken on this Report. If any of these can be made known consistently with the public interest, they will be reported to the House.

**Mr. Hughes**: Is the Prime Minister aware that the latest reports of the Secret Service accounts show that last year we voted £5 million, and that the Secret Service was so embarrassed by our generosity that they gave £190,000 back; and does he not think it is time for a scrutiny of the activities of this department by the Committee on Public Accounts?

**The Prime Minister**: Not by the Committee on Public Accounts. The practice to which the hon. Gentleman refers is by no means unique in history.

**Mr. F. J. Bellenger**: Can the Prime Minister say how much of this Privy Councillors' Report concerns security matters—which obviously cannot be dealt with in the House—and other matters which are really affecting public opinion in this country, as, for example, the recent statements of the two gentlemen who disappeared from the Foreign Office, which seems to indicate that the Civil Service, or at any rate the Foreign Service part of it, is not being operated to the benefit of the public interest?

**The Prime Minister**: I am told by my right hon. Friend that this Report is being studied; it is being examined. It is an important document, and when I have myself had an opportunity to examine the recommendations of the Report I should like to make a statement to the House; but the right hon. Gentleman will understand that I could not anticipate that now.



20TH FEBRUARY 1956

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS  
(STATEMENTS)

45. Mr. Lewis asked the Prime Minister if he is aware of the growing practice of various Departments of issuing official and semi-official statements confirming or denying matters which are the subject of Parliamentary Questions and debates; and whether he will instruct Departments that these should not be issued pending being dealt with in the House.

**The Prime Minister (Sir Anthony Eden):** It is an accepted principle that while Parliament is in session important matters are announced by Ministers to Parliament. I am not aware of any growing practice that derogates from this principle. I could not accept the proposition that the presence of a Motion or Question on the Order Paper automatically makes it impossible for anything to be said outside on the same subject.

**Mr. Lewis:** While thanking the Prime Minister for the general tone of his reply, may I ask him whether he is aware that last Tuesday Questions were placed on the Order Paper by hon. Members on both sides of the House; on Wednesday evening the Treasury, to whom the Questions were addressed issued a public statement which was, in effect, an answer to the Questions; and yet on Thursday the Leader of the House stated that the Treasury was thinking of making a statement, which, in fact, it did make on the Friday; and by adopting that method the rights of hon. Members were abrogated as a result of the action of the Treasury? Will the right hon. Gentleman look into this matter if I give the actual details?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I will look into it. I thought the hon. Gentleman was on another hare, about something said by Foreign Office spokesmen, but since it is this one perhaps he will let me have the details.

**Mr. H. Wilson:** While we all understand the Prime Minister's unwillingness to make a general rule on this point, was it not a rather strange occurrence that there should be the statement of the Treasury spokesman about building licensing and import licensing, not only because these Questions were on the Order Paper, but because the Chancellor was about to make a statement to the House? Was not this an unusual procedure?

**The Prime Minister:** I will look into it. I was not conscious of what was behind the Question.

16TH FEBRUARY 1956

## UNITED NATIONS

45. Mr. Beswick asked the Prime Minister what measures he proposed or discussed with President Eisenhower for the strengthening of the authority of the United Nations organisation.

**The Prime Minister (Sir Anthony Eden):** Her Majesty's Government are always in favour of strengthening the authority of the United Nations, but no particular measures to this end were discussed with President Eisenhower.

**Mr. Beswick:** Is the Prime Minister aware that the most hopeful and best received part of the speech of the Foreign Secretary on 24th January was when he broke away from balance of power politics and its possibilities and expressed his hopes of more positive United Nations action, as on the Arab-Israeli border; and ought it not to be possible for this country to give some specific and constructive lead in this matter?

**The Prime Minister:** I have frequently dealt with that question, and so has my right hon. Friend. I thought the hon. Gentleman was asking about wider propositions. Certainly the House knows quite well what we have suggested.

**Mr. Beswick:** Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that, as a matter of fact, the House does not know; that what the House was told this week was that it was not a matter for this country to make specific proposals; and that I am now asking the right hon. Gentleman if he will take the initiative in these matters?

**The Prime Minister:** We have taken the initiative in these matters; they are United Nations matters, and therefore, though we may say we are quite ready to receive any suggestions, it must be in accordance with what the Secretariat-General and their officers concerned themselves require or suggest.



22 FEB 1956

**TRADES UNION CONGRESS  
(MEETING)**

45. **Mr. Lewis** asked the Prime Minister if, in view of the concern felt by the Trades Union Congress over the Government's recent announcement concerning the economic situation, he will arrange to meet the Trades Union Congress as early as possible to discuss the Government's proposals and to hear the views of the Trades Union Congress.

**The Lord Privy Seal (Mr. R. A. Butler)** : I have been asked to reply.

It is—and has been—my right hon. Friend's intention to meet members of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress at some convenient moment soon.

**Mr. Lewis** : While thanking the Lord Privy Seal for that reply, may I ask him to convey to the Prime Minister the feeling that the T.U.C. General Council is very concerned? If he can arrange for the Prime Minister to see the General Council as speedily as possible, I am sure they will convey to him some home truths on behalf of the trade union movement of this country.

**Mr. Butler** : I do not doubt that my right hon. Friend is aware of the General Council's anxieties. He has already had an indication of them. I am equally certain that if there is to be an exchange there will be an exchange of realities. This may lead to the national good, and that is the desire of my right hon. Friend.



28TH FEBRUARY 1956

**ATOMIC ENERGY  
(PEACEFUL USES)**

48. **Mr. A. Henderson** asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of President Eisenhower's offer to supply uranium to other countries, he will propose consultation between the United States Government and Her Majesty's Government in order to promote international co-operation in the financing and construction of atomic reactors in Asian and African countries.

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving me this opportunity to welcome President Eisenhower's latest imaginative offer to supply uranium for the development of the peaceful uses of atomic energy. How the countries of the world, individually or in association, can best make use of this offer is a question which would need most careful thought.

Meanwhile, a start has already been made in the Colombo Plan and Bagdad Pact as well as in bilateral arrangements between our two countries and certain countries in Africa and Asia to help them in training in the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

**Mr. Henderson:** Does the Prime Minister's reply mean that Her Majesty's Government are to follow the action of the United States Government and make supplies of uranium available to other countries for research and development purposes? If not, will not this country be placed at a serious disadvantage in competition with the United States?

**The Prime Minister:** The American offer to make uranium available to the countries which do not produce it is extremely generous: I think that is perfectly correct. We have been working closely with the United States in such matters as technical help for the countries which produce uranium. As to our being able to make supplies available, however, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that these supplies are scarce. We are not placed like the United States, and I am afraid that I cannot hold out hopes that we may be able to follow them in that field.

**Mr. E. Fletcher:** Will the Prime Minister confirm that Her Majesty's Government will be prepared to give technical and, if necessary, financial help to countries in Asia and Africa to enable them to benefit from the economic use of nuclear energy?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, we have been doing that and have been discussing that with the United States. We have certain plans to help what are called the under-developed countries in Africa and Asia to form a nucleus of trained technicians. We think that that is their first need, because until they have that, they will not be able to make much use of the raw material or other instruments placed at their disposal.

**Mr. J. Griffiths:** While welcoming this offer, as the Prime Minister has done, may I ask whether it would not be wise at this stage, at the beginning of this new era, to consider ways and means of channelling these supplies through the United Nations to all countries, rather than by doing that through bilateral agreements?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not think that that is excluded because, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, this all forms part of the offer which the President of the United States made to the United Nations some considerable time ago.



28TH FEBRUARY 1956

## HYDROGEN BOMB

46. Mr. Warbey asked the Prime Minister whether he is now in a position to make a statement on the possibility of any country making test explosions of hydrogen bombs in the megaton range without their being detected.

**The Prime Minister:** If I were to answer this Question I should have to give information which it would not be in the public interest to give. I am, therefore, not prepared to make a statement. 6

**Mr. Warbey:** Is the Prime Minister aware that last week he said that he would look into this matter, and he asked for a Question to be put down, but that now he gives no answer? Is he aware that public opinion is worried primarily only about the explosion of very big bombs with vast radio-active fall-outs? Is it not completely nonsense to suggest that such vast explosions could be made anywhere, without being detected? Will he stop looking for fresh excuses for doing nothing, and will he get on with the job?

**The Prime Minister:** I answered the hon. Gentleman perfectly politely last week by saying that I would make inquiry as to whether I could answer his Question, because I was doubtful whether it was in the public interest that I should. I have since taken advice, and in the public interest I should not answer it; and no provocation by the hon. Member will cause me to depart from that decision.

28TH FEBRUARY 1956

## GOVERNMENT (POLICY DECISIONS)

45. Mr. Swingler asked the Prime Minister if he is aware of the widening gap in time between the submission of reports to the heads of Departments of State and the reaching of decisions on the recommendations made; and if he will draw the attention of Ministers to the need to combat this tendency and to reach early decisions at all levels of government when proposals have been submitted.

**The Prime Minister (Sir Anthony Eden):** I certainly do not accept the view that Her Majesty's present Government take longer than any of their predecessors to reach important decisions of policy, whether on recommendations of advisory bodies or otherwise.

The second part of the Question does not, therefore, arise.

**Mr. Swingler:** Is not the Prime Minister aware of the increasing number of subjects which are alleged to be under comprehensive review in Government Departments? Is he not aware that Ministers are constantly evading questions by alleging that subjects are under comprehensive review? Will not the Prime Minister draw the attention of some Ministers to some subjects, such as compensation for mining subsidence or local government reform, which have now been under comprehensive review for more than five years? It is not time we had some decisions?

**The Prime Minister:** To take the first of the hon. Member's points, which, I agree, is important, it has been under review since 1949, including two and a half years of Labour Government.—  
[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] That is quite true.



1st MARCH 1956

**PAKISTAN  
(PASHTU-SPEAKING AREAS)**

48. **Mr. Mott-Radclyffe** asked the Prime Minister in view of the official claims advanced in certain quarters on behalf of Pashtunistan, if he will give a formal assurance that Her Majesty's Government acknowledge Pakistan as the successors to the responsibilities which Her Majesty's Government previously exercised in the Pashtu-speaking areas of undivided India.

**The Prime Minister :** The view of Her Majesty's Government, which was also the view of our predecessors in office, is as follows. In 1947, Pakistan came into existence as a new, sovereign, independent member of the Commonwealth. Her Majesty's Government regard her as having, with the full consent of the overwhelming majority of the Pashtu-speaking peoples concerned, both in the administered and non-administered areas, succeeded to the exercise of the powers formerly exercised by the Crown in India on the North-West Frontier of the sub-Continent. Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom fully support the Government of Pakistan in maintaining their sovereignty over the areas East of the Durand Line and in regarding this Line as the international frontier with Afghanistan. Her Majesty's Government are confident that there is no outstanding question between Pakistan and Afghanistan which cannot be settled by peaceful means on the basis of the legal position as I have now stated it. They have throughout been in close consultation with the Government of Pakistan and are convinced that Pakistan is determined to seek a peaceful solution.

**Mr. Mott-Radclyffe :** May I ask my right hon. Friend whether it is not a fact that after the transfer of power in 1947 the majority of the tribal leaders in this area openly expressed the wish to be regarded as part and parcel of Pakistan, and to be administered, in a loose sense, by Pakistan?

**The Prime Minister :** I do not know about the last part of my hon. Friend's supplementary question, but according to my information there are no significant

sections of the population of these areas which are in any way dissatisfied with the present status as Pakistan citizens. Indeed, all the evidence that we have is the other way.

**Mr. Gaitskell :** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it would be the desire of my right hon. and hon. Friends to be associated with his statement, which, as he said, accords with the policy of the Labour Government?

**The Prime Minister :** I am much obliged to the right hon. Gentleman.

1st MARCH 1956

**NATIONALISED INDUSTRIES  
(WAGES)**

47. **Mr. Gresham Cooke** asked the Prime Minister whether he will now call a conference of the heads of the nationalised boards, to be presided over by himself, with a view to obtaining agreement on a common wage policy to be followed by all nationalised industries, both during the present phase of economic restraint and subsequently.

**The Prime Minister :** The nationalised industries, like other industries, are responsible for dealing with their own wages questions. It is, however, of the greatest importance that all concerned with these questions should exercise their responsibility with a full knowledge of economic considerations affecting the national interest. That is one of the reasons why with my colleagues I am having meetings with representative leaders of industry. One of these will be with the nationalised industries.

**Mr. Gresham Cooke :** May I express the hope—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] that—

**Mr. Speaker :** Question Time is not the time for expressing hopes.

**Mr. Gresham Cooke :** Is my right hon. Friend aware that this meeting with the nationalised industries will command a great deal of approval in the country? Is he also aware that there is a section of trade union opinion which thinks that the nationalised industries should pay better wages than industry generally? Would he express the view to the heads of the industries that that opinion is wrong?

**The Prime Minister :** The whole matter is governed, of course, by the nationalisation Acts, which arranged for the establishment of negotiating machinery for the settlement of the terms and conditions of employment in the industries. I do not think that I want to comment upon that.



5 FEB 1959

#### ANTARCTICA

45. **Mr. Biggs-Davison** asked the Prime Minister what further consultations he has had with President Eisenhower about the latter's proposal for a treaty on the legal status of Antarctic territories.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Harold Macmillan)**: Consultations about President Eisenhower's proposal concerning Antarctica have been taking place through normal diplomatic channels. The proposal did not envisage any provision relating to the legal status of Antarctic territories, except that this should remain unchanged for the duration of the treaty.

#### EURATOM

46. **Mr. Mason** asked the Prime Minister if he will now make a statement about the recently concluded negotiations on the United Kingdom-Euratom Agreement; why it has been so long delayed; and to what extent this will enable British manufacturers of atomic power stations to compete fairly with the Americans in the Euratom market.

**The Prime Minister**: The Agreement was signed yesterday and the text was published as a White Paper. Having regard to the nature of the questions

involved, I do not think that the negotiations were unduly prolonged.

The prospects for sales of British reactors in the Euratom market will depend on commercial considerations. The established achievements of the Calder Hall prototypes, and the developments incorporated in the later commercial designs now available for export, should give British manufacturers a good prospect of success in Euratom countries.

**Mr. Mason**: Does not the Prime Minister realise that the Americans have already made great inroads into Euratom, in that they have poured in millions of dollars and have also imported into Euratom subsidised nuclear fuels? Is not the complacent and rather miserable attitude of the Government towards our own atomic energy industry strangling it at birth? What are the prospects within this agreement of a Ministerial Committee emerging whereby we can go from this form of co-operation to a closer association with Euratom?

**The Prime Minister**: In answer to the first part of the hon. Member's supplementary question, of course the position of the Americans is quite different from ours. Owing to the low cost of generating electricity in the United States from their natural resources, they are, of course, not so advanced in this matter as we are. In answer to the last part of the supplementary question, I have made it clear in my discussions, as has my right hon. Friend, that while the first stage is to consider this matter further, I am hopeful that some Ministerial investigation can be made. On the other hand, we have to consult our colleagues in the rest of the O.E.E.C. countries, and that is why we did not make a statement yesterday.

**Mr. Robens**: Whilst it may very well be true that we are much further forward in this sphere than the Americans, is the Prime Minister aware that not only are the Americans making great inroads, but they have, in fact, secured far more contracts for atomic power stations on the Continent of Europe than we have and that we are unlikely to secure more because the Americans are able to give the first year's fuel free of charge? Does the right hon. Gentleman regard that as fair competition, and are we able to stand up to that sort of thing?



10 FEB 1959

### THE PRIME MINISTER AND MR. DULLES (DISCUSSIONS)

43. Mr. Lewis asked the Prime Minister whether he will make a statement on his recent official discussions with Mr. Dulles; to what extent these discussions included matters pertaining to his pending visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and whether, in view of these talks, he will now announce the date of his departure to Moscow.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Harold Macmillan):** The discussions with Mr. Dulles covered a wide range of subjects including my forthcoming visit to Moscow, the date of which I announced on 5th February.

**Mr. Lewis:** We express our regret at the illness of Mr. Foster Dulles. May we have an assurance from the Prime Minister that he in no way associated himself with the statement alleged to have been made that, before negotiations commence, threats of war are being used regarding Berlin? Does not the right hon. Gentleman feel it would be better if we were to say that before any question of war is discussed we should get together and try to reach some understanding?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure the whole House will join in wishing Mr. Dulles a speedy recovery from his illness. The Government stands upon the declaration made on behalf of the N.A.T.O. Powers regarding the matter of Berlin.



Governor, as I understand it, and the assumption is that the rulers will co-operate, it does not mean that they have been approached? May I ask specifically whether or not any approach about this town has been made to the native rulers and whether they are co-operating in the project?

**Mr. Amery:** I do not think the hon. Member can have heard my reply. I said that the initiative in this lies with the Federal Government, and the Federal rulers can rely on the help of the Governor. The initiative is theirs and not ours.

### GAMBIA

#### Economic Expansion

38. **Mr. Sorensen** asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies how much public and private capital has been lost in Gambia since 1945 arising from abortive public and private economic enterprise; what further examination will take place into the best means of ensuring economic expansion in the Colony; and to what extent traditional and indigenous economic activities have expanded with the growth of population.

**Mr. J. Amery:** The main loss in the public sector was due to the failure some years ago of the Colonial Development Corporation's poultry and rice development schemes. It was about £1.3 million. I have no information regarding losses by private enterprise. The policy of the Gambia Government is to concentrate on improving communications and agriculture.

On the last part of the Question all indications are that national production has kept pace with the growth of population.

**Mr. Sorensen:** Is not it true that private enterprise has lost quite as much as the Corporation did some years ago, and may we at least have an assurance that the Government are paying attention to the needs of this small Colony and that, whatever failures there may have been in the past, they will not deter the Government from making new efforts on a sounder economic basis in the future.

**Mr. Amery:** With regard to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question, I have no statistical information on the losses sustained by private enterprise, but I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we very much wish to see economic development in the Gambia.

### SOMALILAND

#### Constitution

43. **Mr. Brockway** asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies what reply has been given to the official representations made by the Somali National Front, the National United Front of British Somaliland and the Somali Youth League for constitutional changes, particularly in relation to the attainment of independence by Somalia in 1960.

**Mr. J. Amery:** The reply is embodied in the statement made by my right hon. Friend at Hargeisa on 9th February, the text of which was given in my reply to the hon. Member for Essex, South-East (Mr. Braine) on that day.

**Mr. Brockway:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, while we welcome the fact that within three months of the last constitutional changes new constitutional changes have been announced in Somaliland, we would ask whether he is satisfied that even now the changes will go far enough to meet the demands of the people of Somaliland for self-government and for union with their fellow-countrymen across the Italian and French borders?

**Mr. Amery:** My right hon. Friend would not have legislated as he did if he had not been so satisfied.

### NORTH-EASTERN AREA (INDUSTRIAL BUILDING)

45. **Mr. Short** asked the Prime Minister how many new factories are likely to be established in the North-East as a result of Government plans made in the light of evidence submitted to him during his recent visit to the area.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Harold Macmillan):** My visit was not intended to make specific proposals but to inform myself. I should add that twenty-nine extensions to Government factories in the North-East Development Area have been authorised in the last few weeks and are



Another case is still under consideration. There is also a considerable amount of privately-financed industrial building going on, and further work is expected to start soon.

**Mr. Short :** Is the Prime Minister aware that there has been a considerable deterioration of the situation since he visited the North-East? Is he aware that in the four towns he visited, Newcastle has 2,600 unemployed, Middlesbrough more than 3,000, Sunderland 2,200 and even Stockton, his old Parliamentary seat, 1,500? Further, is he aware that there are 50,000 people unemployed in the North-East now and that this is a matter of some importance? Is he aware that 4.3 per cent. of our men are unemployed, and does not he feel that these steps that the Government have taken to meet the situation are totally inadequate? Why does not the Prime Minister use the information he got when he was in the North-East to take action to alleviate the situation?

**The Prime Minister :** In addition to the twenty-nine extensions to which I have referred and which will provide work for 2,700 people, 74 privately-financed industrial buildings, totalling 4.7 million sq. ft., are under construction, which will create approximately 1,800 additional jobs. In addition, two large schemes, the South Durham scheme and the Vickers-Armstrongs (Shipbuilders) Ltd. scheme, are under construction, with about 3,000 jobs likely. Also, 53 private schemes, to employ an additional 2,000, have been given location approval but construction has not yet started.

**Mr. P. Williams :** Does not my right hon. Friend agree that the most important thing both for the North-East and the whole country is that international trade should recover to the extent that basic major industries can recover, and therefore that the first priority should be existing industries rather than the encouragement of new industries?

**The Prime Minister :** That is why we are doing all we can, both by international methods and the extension of our export credits, to improve international trade.

**Mr. Shinwell :** While we on this side of the House and everybody concerned welcome any steps taken by the Government

to alleviate the position, does not the Prime Minister understand that what has already been suggested touches only the fringe of the problem and that a great deal could be done by the provision of finance for constructing hospitals and schools and reconstructing the roadways in the North-East? Could not something more be done in that direction in order to mitigate the harsh evils of unemployment?

**The Prime Minister :** Since about July last year continual increases have been made in the public sector of expenditure. When we come to discuss what is proposed for public expenditure for next year, the right hon. Gentleman should be satisfied that that, too, will have very substantial increases.

#### THE PRIME MINISTER (VISIT TO SOVIET UNION)

46. **Mr. Zilliacus** asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the difficulties with the Common Market Plan and the need for expanding trade, he will, in Moscow, explore the possibility of reaching agreement for economic co-operation in Europe on the basis of the proposals first made by the Soviet Government to the Economic Committee for Europe of the United Nations in April, 1956, and repeated in 1957.

**The Prime Minister :** The main purpose of the visit is to have an exploratory exchange of views on world problems. The talks will be confidential and I am not prepared to disclose in advance what particular points will be raised by Her Majesty's Government.

**Mr. Zilliacus :** While we quite understand the point made by the Prime Minister, may I ask whether he will bear in mind the importance of all-European economic co-operation in connection with the expanding of trade, in the present situation? In that connection, may I inquire whether something can be done on the basis of these proposals, which were favourably received by the Economic Commission for Europe?

**The Prime Minister :** I will certainly bear in mind any contribution to this problem, including contributions made by the hon. Gentleman.



47. **Mr. Zilliacus** asked the Prime Minister whether he will indicate the recent developments, international or other, that induced him to take the initiative, now, to signify his acceptance of the standing Soviet invitation, first tendered to and accepted by his predecessor in April, 1956.

**The Prime Minister:** I made a full statement to the House on 5th February, and I do not think that any further clarification is required.

**Mr. Zilliacus:** Is the Prime Minister aware that there is a very widespread impression that there is a connection between the term of office of the Government and the date of his acceptance of the invitation for this visit? Will he give more specific reasons why he is going now?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman should not necessarily apply to other people his own standards of conduct.

48. **Mr. S. Silverman** asked the Prime Minister whether, on the occasion of his visit to Moscow, he will consider with Mr. Khrushchev the possibility of a solution of the German problem along lines similar to those of the Austrian Peace Treaty.

49. **Mr. Rankin** asked the Prime Minister whether, in his conversations at Moscow he will explore the possibility of uniting Germany by other means than by free elections.

50. **Mr. Swingler** asked the Prime Minister if, in his conversations in Moscow, he will discuss with Mr. Khrushchev the possibility of negotiating a German Peace Treaty on the lines of the Austrian Peace Treaty.

**The Prime Minister:** I would refer the hon. Gentlemen to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mr. Swingler) on Tuesday last.

**Mr. Silverman:** Does not the Prime Minister agree that in the case of Austria the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the Treaty by which Austria undertook not to form part of any military alliance on either side has greatly profited Austrian independence and prosperity as well as the cause of peace in Europe? Is there any real reason why the principles applied to Austria so successfully should not be

applied to the much bigger and more serious problem of Germany?

**The Prime Minister:** I understand the point the hon. Member is making, but I would remind him that in Austria there were free elections.

**Mr. Rankin:** Is the Prime Minister aware that, since he gave the two replies to which he has referred, in *The Times* of today there is a statement which says that Dr. Adenauer is now thinking in terms of a *de facto* recognition of Eastern Germany in return, of course, for concessions? In view of that statement, would the Prime Minister consider discussing with Mr. Khrushchev the possibility of creating a body which could speak for both parts of Germany on external affairs and, later on, would he also think of discussing that with Dr. Adenauer when he goes to Western Germany?

**The Prime Minister:** That, of course, is an entirely different question from the one on the Paper.

**Mr. Swingler:** Would the Prime Minister agree that there is no purpose in his visit to Moscow unless it be to discuss with Mr. Khrushchev proposals which have some chance of acceptance on both sides—in the West and in the East—and that the proposal which has most chance of acceptance is some form of disengagement plan which involves the exclusion of at any rate a large part of Central Europe from the rival military blocs?

**The Prime Minister:** That again is a different question from those I am answering, but I can understand that if discussions are to be fruitful all kinds of points of view must be put forward and, as the hon. Member says, we must try to reach something which will be satisfactory to both sides.

**Mr. J. Hynd:** Will the Prime Minister make clear, in view of the supplementary question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman), that the Austrian solution involved Austria remaining outside military alliances entirely, by the free decision of Austria itself? Would he agree that that would be a suitable principle to apply in this case?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the hon. Member was quoting some words I used when I said that I do not see how a



country could be free unless it was free to make its own foreign policy. These are very difficult matters. We must try to treat them objectively and I do not want to get tied down to this or that point of view; nor especially, if I may say so, do I want to get into the rivalry of the various Motions on the Order Paper from both sides of the Opposition.

51. **Mr. Grimond** asked the Prime Minister if, during his visit to Russia and any subsequent visits to other countries, he will discuss the limitation of the number of countries making and testing nuclear bombs.

**The Prime Minister:** I have already told the House that I should prefer not to indicate beforehand which specific subjects we would wish to discuss in Moscow.

**Mr. Grimond:** While appreciating that, may I ask if the Prime Minister would agree that, while it may be necessary for the West as a whole to keep the nuclear deterrent until there is a disarmament agreement, it is very alarming if increasing numbers of countries on both sides of the world are to arm themselves with these bombs, which is quite unnecessary to preserve the present balance?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the most urgent question is to see whether we can reach a satisfactory conclusion of the Geneva Conference.

52. **Mr. Harold Davies** asked the Prime Minister what further consultations he had with President Eisenhower, as a preliminary to his proposed Moscow visit, on the question of disengagement in Central Europe.

**The Prime Minister:** As I have frequently told the House, such consultations as I have with President Eisenhower are private and confidential.

**Mr. Davies:** Does the Prime Minister agree that millions of people in Britain would like to see a British Government, whichever party were in power, speaking for Britain and not always having to consult on its policy before its representatives undertake a very important diplomatic trip? That is true of American people. Millions of Americans would like to see a British Government taking a lead different from that taken by some members of the State Department.

**The Prime Minister:** If the hon. Member recalls the statement I made about ten days ago, he will know that I made it clear that my initiative to visit Russia was taken on my own responsibility and I informed our Allies of it.

### BRITISH TRADE FAIR, LISBON

53. **Sir L. Plummer** asked the Prime Minister what plans he has for visiting the British Trade Fair to be held in Lisbon next May.

**The Prime Minister:** None, Sir. But my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has accepted an invitation to be present at the opening.

**Sir L. Plummer:** Is the Prime Minister aware that his Answer will give considerable satisfaction to a number of people in this country who share his detestation of totalitarian government and that they will be happy that on this occasion he is not to grace Portugal with his presence? Has he any fear that if he did go to Portugal he, like another right hon. Member of this House, would be declared *persona non grata*?

**The Prime Minister:** I think it very important that we should have this fair. Our relations with Portugal are very good. Our exports to Portugal in 1958 totalled £22½ million. I should like to congratulate the Federation of British Industries on its initiative in making arrangements for this fair.

**Mr. Bevan:** Would not the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be most unfortunate if our participation in the fair indicated any respect or admiration by us for constitutional behaviour in Portugal?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not understand that point of view. Portugal is our oldest Ally. It is a member of N.A.T.O., by an arrangement made by the Foreign Secretary in a previous Government. Apart from that, we are always being urged to try to increase trade without regard to ideological differences.

**Mr. Bevan:** Does the right hon. Gentleman regard Portugal as a bulwark of the free world?



**The Prime Minister :** I think the right hon. Member is not facing the issue I put to him. We are having a perpetual demand to increase trade. Trade is one thing and ideological points of view may be another.

**Mr. McAdden :** Would my right hon. Friend explain why it is thought right not to go to a totalitarian Government such as Portugal, whereas it is thought thoroughly right and praiseworthy to go to a totalitarian Government in Soviet Russia?

**The Prime Minister :** It was that logical dilemma which my hon. Friend has made clear that I was trying to hint at.

**Mr. Shinwell :** Might not it be that after the Prime Minister has visited totalitarian Russia he might be inclined to change his mind about visiting totalitarian Portugal?

**The Prime Minister :** I should very much like to go to Portugal. My only trouble is that I am not sure whether I shall have the time to do so in May.

**Mr. Shinwell :** May we now take it as quite firm that the General Election will take place in the month of May?

**The Prime Minister :** I think it is more likely that we shall be engaged during the month of May—at least I hope so—in very important negotiations in regard to Europe.

## COLONIAL TERRITORIES

### Gambia and British Cameroons

54. **Mr. John Hall** asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies to what extent it is now Government policy that the Gambia and the British Cameroons should be absorbed into adjacent French territories; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr. J. Amery :** We have no such policy as regards the Gambia, though we would naturally welcome closer co-operation in cultural and economic matters with the neighbouring French Territory.

As regards the Cameroons I would invite my hon. Friend's attention to the reply which I gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Brockway).

**Mr. Hall :** Is my hon. Friend aware that I found it a little difficult to hear what he said? Will he assure the House that should there be any intention to change the present status of either the Gambia or the British Cameroons by their association with any other Territories, the populations of those Territories will have an opportunity to express their own views about it?

**Mr. Amery :** Yes, indeed.

## CYPRUS

**Mr. Bevan** (by Private Notice) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he has any statement to make about his negotiations with the representatives of the Greek and Turkish Governments regarding the future of Cyprus.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs** (Mr. Selwyn Lloyd) : I had a long meeting last night with the Foreign Ministers of Greece and Turkey to discuss the future of Cyprus.

As the House knows, discussions have been going on for some time between the Greek and Turkish Governments about this matter. The discussions began informally in New York after the last United Nations debate on Cyprus. I was informed, during the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation meeting in Paris, last December, by Mr. Averoff and Mr. Zorlu of the wish of their two Governments to continue those discussions. I was told by them of the basis upon which they would be continued, and we have been kept informed throughout of their progress. On 11th February agreement was reached between the two Governments in Zurich.

Her Majesty's Government have always maintained that the only hope for a final solution of the Cyprus problem lay in agreement between the Greek and Turkish Governments and the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. We therefore warmly welcome the fact that the Zurich agreement has been made.

The two Foreign Ministers came to London to tell me its precise terms. These are, of course, in addition to matters affecting the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, vital British interests in this island, responsibility for which rests with



**Mr. Amory:** As to the first part of the hon. Friend's observations, apart from his other distinctions, his name will be honourably linked with dustbins. As to the second part of the question, I am sorry that I must not anticipate my next statement.

**Mr. Hector Hughes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total amount collected for Purchase Tax on gramophone records.

**Mr. Amory:** Just under £6 million in the financial year 1957-58.

**Mr. Hughes:** In view of the great educational value of many gramophone records, would the right hon. Gentleman consider reducing or abolishing the tax on educational records and put these records in the same category as books?

**Mr. Amory:** I am giving very careful consideration, of course, to all aspects of these difficult problems.

#### Post-war Credits

**Mr. Gower** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the approximate cost of reducing the ages for the payment of post-war credits by 10, 15, and 20 years, respectively.

**Mr. Amory:** About £176 million, £258 million and £330 million.

#### BAGDAD PACT

**Mr. Rankin** asked the Prime Minister to what extent the declaration by the Minister of Defence at the Bagdad Pact and Ministerial Council, to the effect that Great Britain remained pledged to uphold all the military obligations of the Bagdad Pact, including those directed to the defence of the territories of the Bagdad Pact countries against subversion, represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Harold Macmillan):** I have nothing to add to my reply I gave to the hon. Member for Northampton (Mr. Warbey) and the hon. Member for Leek (Mr. Harold Davies), on 5th February.

**Mr. Rankin:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, in reply to a Question asked on 27th February, 1957, the Minister of Defence stated that defence against

aggression meant that British forces could interfere in a Bagdad Pact country where the ruler described any popular uprising as being due to Communist subversion? Does the Prime Minister remember that he himself proclaimed exactly the same doctrine to justify intervention in Jordan on 17th July last year? Do the replies to which he referred mean that the Government still reserve that right to interfere in the affairs of Turkey, Iraq and Pakistan at the request of the rulers of those countries?

**The Prime Minister:** In every case, of course, every consideration has to be given to the particular circumstances. The purpose of the Pact is to promote, so far as it is possible, a sense of stability and security.

**Mr. Gaitskell:** Does the Prime Minister still regard the Bagdad Pact as the basis of the Government's Middle East policy, as it was once said to be? Does he not feel, in view of developments in Iraq, that it would be wise to make plain that this Pact is now really a northern tier agreement directed only against the possible danger of aggression from the north?

**The Prime Minister:** I think it would be a very great mistake if we were to do anything at the present time to weaken the sense of confidence of the countries concerned, who are members, with us, of the Bagdad Pact.

**Mr. Gaitskell:** That does not answer my question. Until now, it has been Her Majesty's Government's policy to regard the Bagdad Pact as the basis of their policy in the whole of the Middle East. Would it not be advisable—if not this afternoon, on some early occasion—to make plain that the situation has changed and they now look upon the Bagdad Pact as more limited in its objectives?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course, the situation has changed; but it is one of the bases on which we must rely.

#### SELECT COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE (SCOTTISH BUSINESS)

**Mr. Rankin** asked the Prime Minister if he will move to extend the order of reference of the Select Committee on Procedure to enable it to



consider particularly the desirability of increasing the extent to which Scottish business is conducted in Scotland.

**The Prime Minister :** I am doubtful whether it would be appropriate for the Select Committee to consider such wide proposals as the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

**Mr. Rankin :** In the light of that Answer, and bearing in mind his former answer to me, will the Prime Minister appreciate that the Scottish Labour Party has given great consideration to this problem and believes that there is a solution which can be achieved without violating the economic integrity of the United Kingdom or involving Parliamentary separation? Will the right hon. Gentleman again consider the advisability of referring the matter to a Speaker's Conference, as the Scottish Labour Party has suggested?

**The Prime Minister :** There are various methods. There was the Royal Commission, which the hon. Gentleman at one time suggested, which met some four years ago. The results of its work were very helpful. There have been other changes since then as regards the Scottish Grand Committee. I think that it would, perhaps, be well to see the report of the Select Committee on Procedure before reaching any further judgment.

#### DEFENCE (NUCLEAR ATTACK)

47. **Mr. Swingler** asked the Prime Minister, in view of Her Majesty's Government's policy with regard to the evacuation of the civil population in the event of war and to the defence of bomber and rocket bases, what steps he is taking to co-ordinate the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Minister of Defence in these matters.

56. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Prime Minister, since it is the Government's policy to defend only air and rocket bases on the ground that the country as a whole cannot be defended against nuclear attack, to what extent he has co-ordinated the policy and responsibilities of the Home Department and the Ministry of Defence in this matter.

**The Prime Minister :** The responsibilities of the Departments concerned with defence against a possible nuclear attack on this country are clearly defined and the policy is fully co-ordinated.

**Mr. Swingler :** How is it possible to reconcile these policies? Is it not a fact that the Home Secretary is engaged, in a very meagre way, in preparing Civil Defence against what is euphemistically called conventional air attack, while the Minister of Defence is engaged in threatening nuclear retaliation against any and every form of attack? How does the Prime Minister reconcile these policies?

**The Prime Minister :** There is nothing irreconcilable. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary carries out his part of the duties in close co-ordination with those of the Defence Minister.

#### THE PRIME MINISTER (VISIT TO SOVIET UNION)

48. **Mr. Zilliacus** asked the Prime Minister to what extent, in discussions during his proposed visit to Moscow, he is prepared to reconsider his policy on united Germany being free to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, on the maintenance of the Bagdad Pact, on armed intervention against alleged subversion in any country at the request of its Government, and on the negotiation of political settlements before accepting any substantial measure of international disarmament.

**The Prime Minister :** I made a full statement to the House on 5th February, and I do not think that any further amplification would be helpful.

**Mr. Zilliacus :** Is it not a fact that the Soviet position on these matters is very well known and, whereas the Soviet Government would reach agreement on the basis of the proposals for disengagement and for co-operation in the Middle East advocated by the Opposition, there is no hope of agreement unless the basic positions of the Government are modified? Is the Prime Minister prepared to use them as bargaining counters when he goes to Moscow?

**The Prime Minister :** The hon. Gentleman says that he speaks—I do not know.



on what authority—for the Soviet Government. I propose, if I am able to do so, to speak to the Soviet Government.

52. **Mr. Lewis** asked the Prime Minister whether, during his forthcoming discussions with Mr. Khrushchev, he will seek an assurance that, in any proposed talks or agreement concerning Germany leading to an eventual peace treaty, such treaty will contain adequate clauses to secure the removal of any known Nazi judge or general from office, in either East or West Germany, in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement, and a joint commission to investigate the charges and allegations that there are now in office in West Germany 596 jurists who served in Hitler's Special Courts.

**The Prime Minister** : I cannot anticipate what matters may be raised at these discussions.

**Mr. Lewis** : Without asking the Prime Minister to anticipate, may we ask whether or not he agrees that it would be a good thing if these former Nazis, who are alleged to be in both East and West Germany, were removed from these State positions and quasi-State positions? Will the right hon. Gentleman bear that in mind if he has the opportunity of raising this question?

**The Prime Minister** : Yes, Sir. But that is not the point raised in the Question. The responsibility for judicial appointments in the Federal Republic is, of course, a matter for the German authorities. That has been the position since 1949, but Her Majesty's Government retain an interest in this matter and it is one about which I feel sure the Federal Government recognise their responsibilities.

55. **Mr. Hector Hughes** asked the Prime Minister if he will specify the topics he intends to discuss with the Ministers of the Russian Government during his forthcoming visit to Russia.

**The Prime Minister** : I am not prepared to disclose in advance what particular topics will be raised by Her Majesty's Government during these talks.

**Mr. Hughes** : Is the Prime Minister aware—and, of course, he is—of the close inter-relation between culture, trade, industry and international relations? Will he, therefore, seek to encourage

greater intercourse between Russia and the West in these matters?

**The Prime Minister** : I am aware, of course, of the importance of this question.

**Mr. Woodburn** : Is the Prime Minister responsible in any way for the suggestion that he will bring back £1,200 million worth of orders from Russia?

**The Prime Minister** : No, Sir. I think the right hon. Gentleman must have been reading the newspapers.

#### ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY (STAFF)

49 and 50. **Mr. Albu** asked the Prime Minister (1) how many heads of divisions, or scientists at similar level, have left Harwell during each of the last two years ;

(2) what has been the increase in numbers of senior scientific and technical staff and senior administrative staff, respectively, at Harwell over the last two years.

**The Prime Minister** : These are matters of day-to-day management of the Atomic Energy Authority in which I do not regard it as my duty to intervene.

**Mr. Albu** : Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that there have been very serious losses of senior scientific staff at Harwell recently which are causing very great concern? Further, is he aware that it is said that these losses are due to the fact that the establishment is now dominated by the accountancy and administrative staff, the scientists no longer being able to get on with the job of research?

**The Prime Minister** : No, Sir. There are, of course difficulties, and there are movements, some of which have value, between industry and the universities. But there certainly has been a very great advance under the present arrangements for the management of atomic affairs by the independent authority.

#### PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (SELECTION OF CANDIDATES)

51. **Mr. C. Pannell** asked the Prime Minister whether he is aware of the recent application in this country of novel procedures for the selection of candidates for Parliamentary elections ; and if he will



cause a Speaker's Conference to be called to consider the implications of such procedures.

**The Prime Minister :** No, Sir.

**Mr. Pannell :** Does the Prime Minister understand that I am referring to the advent of primary elections in Bournemouth, East and Christchurch, under rules, of course, which would disfranchise the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford (Sir W. Churchill) if he were a constituent there? Does the Prime Minister not think that this sort of thing, taken in conjunction with what has happened in Belfast, North, has imported into British public life a feature which really demands more than superficial examination?

**The Prime Minister :** No, Sir. I think that the constitutional position is quite clear. Anybody can become a candidate for Parliament provided that he fulfils the necessary conditions laid down by law. I think that the House as a whole would agree that those criteria are not very exacting.

#### FOREIGN SECRETARY (SPEECH)

53. **Mr. Zilliacus** asked the Prime Minister whether the speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, at Glasgow on 7th February, alleging that the recent Soviet proposals on Berlin contain a threat to Western communications with that city, represented the policy of the Government.

**The Prime Minister :** Yes, Sir. What my right hon. and learned Friend said was that the Soviet Note of 27th November contained a unilateral denunciation of what we considered to be their obligations with regard to our right of access to Berlin.

**Mr. Zilliacus :** Without justifying this unilateral action, may I ask whether it is not a fact that the Soviet Government have proposed to keep the communications open, merely replacing Soviet officials with East German officials? Could not the threat be overcome by merely treating these East German officials as Soviet agents?

**Hon. Members :** Why?

**The Prime Minister :** The Question asked whether I approve of and agree

with the speech which my right hon. and learned Friend made. I said that I did, and all the more so because the Soviet Note had unilaterally denounced what we regarded as being one of their obligations. That is a matter which has to be discussed and threshed out.

#### EMPLOYMENT

57. **Mr. Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister whether he will now pay an official visit to areas where the percentage rate of unemployment is six or more.

**The Prime Minister :** It would not be possible for me to pay such a visit in the near future. But Departmental Ministers are at present engaged on a series of visits to places with a serious unemployment problem and are reporting on the results of their investigations.

**Mr. Hamilton :** Is the Prime Minister aware that, while we fully realise that he would be fully occupied in visiting all such places, nevertheless if he had accepted this suggestion when I made it some months ago his job would have been very much lighter than it will be if he makes these visits now? Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to go, if he has the opportunity, and explain to these people that they have never had it so good?

**The Prime Minister :** What we are trying to do, and what I think the whole House would like us to try to do, is to concentrate on trying to relieve these areas which have a special problem of their own.

**Mr. Gaitskell :** In view of the statement that Ministers will be reporting to the Prime Minister on their visits to these areas, can we expect a new statement on Government policy to bring work to this part of the country?

**The Prime Minister :** This matter is continuously before the House, and there are opportunities, if the right hon. Gentleman wishes to take them, to debate it as well as discuss it by question and answer.

#### NON-AGGRESSION PACT

58 and 59. **Mr. Harold Davies** asked the Prime Minister (1) if he now intends to follow up the suggestion that he has



REFERENCE  
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made of a non-aggression pact with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ;

(2) if he is now prepared to make an agreement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics guaranteeing that neither country would use the hydrogen bomb against the other.

**The Prime Minister :** I said before and I still feel that if a non-aggression pact can help to reduce tension, I am in favour of it. But I went on to say that it is deeds not words that matter.

**Mr. Davies :** I am grateful to the Prime Minister for the first part of his Answer, but on the second question, concerning the use of the hydrogen bomb one against the other, may I ask whether he does not think that the world would breathe a sigh of relief if we in Britain at least tried to make that kind of agreement with any other country in the world? Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that men and women are tired of old men in uniform following stupid cold war policies?

**The Prime Minister :** I think that what the world wants is to try to create political conditions which will reduce the tension and the danger.

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Lord Privy Seal (Mr. R. A. Butler) :** I have a short statement to make on business.

Conversations have taken place through the usual channels and it is now considered that it would be more convenient for the debate on Foreign Affairs to take place on Thursday of this week rather than on Wednesday.

In consequence of this change, the business on Wednesday will be the completion of the Committee stage of the House Purchase and Housing Bill.

**Mr. Gaitskell :** We were glad to agree to this proposition so as to make it possible for Ministers to spend the whole time on Wednesday in trying to get a final settlement of the Cyprus problem. We hope that, in consequence, it will be possible for both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to take part in the debate on Thursday.

**Mr. Butler :** I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman for the manner in which Her Majesty's Opposition accepted this suggestion, which I think will fit in with the national interest.

### MARLBOROUGH HOUSE

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Harold Macmillan) :** With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will now make a statement about the offer made by the United Kingdom Government at the Montreal Conference, in September, to provide a house for Commonwealth meetings held in London. As the House will remember, this suggestion was welcomed by the Conference.

Her Majesty the Queen, who has shown a close personal interest in this project, has graciously offered to place her Palace of Marlborough House at the disposal of the United Kingdom Government so that it may be available for this purpose. I have expressed to Her Majesty our deep sense of obligation and gratitude and I have received messages from the Prime Ministers of other Commonwealth Governments welcoming this generous offer.

It is a generous and imaginative gesture on the Queen's part to make a royal palace available for this Commonwealth purpose. While it is so used, the Royal Family will no longer have at their disposal a house which has traditionally been the house either of the Queen Mother or the heir to the Throne. I feel confident that if, when the time comes, no other suitable residence is in the disposition of the Crown, a future Parliament will think it right to make appropriate provision for the Prince of Wales to have a home of his own.

The accommodation at Marlborough House will be both ample and suitable for Commonwealth meetings in London. Its main purpose will be to serve as a meeting place for Commonwealth Prime Ministers whenever they assemble in London. It can also accommodate other Commonwealth conferences, the meetings on economic matters which it was agreed at Montreal to co-ordinate under the name of the Commonwealth Economic Consultative Council, and meetings of the Commonwealth Economic Committee and other similar bodies.

The staff of the Commonwealth Economic Committee can be housed there and



told that the local education authority is at the moment revising its earlier plans for the third. If the hon. Member has any particular project to which he wishes to draw my attention, I should, of course, be glad to hear from him.

#### Agriculture (Further Education)

44. **Mr. Wilkins** asked the Minister of Education whether he has now considered the Report of the Committee on Further Education for Agriculture provided by local authorities; and if he will now make a statement.

**Sir E. Boyle:** My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, on behalf of both our Departments, has sought the views of the interested organisations on the proposals contained in the Report. My right hon. Friend will not be in a position to make a statement until these views have been received and considered.

**Mr. Wilkins:** While thanking the hon. Gentleman for that reply, and appreciating that not much time has elapsed since the Report was presented, may I ask whether, to allay the fears in the minds of certain interested people, he can give an assurance that this matter has not been shelved?

**Sir E. Boyle:** No, Sir, it has not. The difficulty is that only a few of the interested organisations have submitted their views so far, but we certainly recognise that this is important.

#### Teachers (Superannuation Regulations)

53. **Dr. King** asked the Minister of Education if he will amend the pensions regulations so as to offer a superannuated teacher who, in the present emergency, goes back to teaching greater financial inducements than at present obtain.

**Sir E. Boyle:** No, Sir. It is a principle of public service superannuation schemes generally that the income of a pensioner re-employed in his previous employment should not be greater than the salary he was receiving on retirement. It would not be right to treat teachers differently.

**Dr. King:** Will the Minister give serious consideration to the representations already made to him by one education authority that there are old teachers who

are willing to do part-time work in the present critical shortage of teachers, but that the amount of work they can do is limited by the factor he has just mentioned?

**Sir E. Boyle:** Yes, Sir. The trouble there is that the change suggested could mean that teachers would do less teaching service after 60 years of age than they do now. I will write to the hon. Gentleman explaining the difficulties that arise here.

**Mr. M. Stewart:** Would the Minister agree, however, that the shortage of teachers is our biggest single problem in education at present and that he ought, therefore, to look at this with a fresh mind?

**Sir E. Boyle:** I think we should look at every question bearing on the shortage of teachers with as fresh a mind as possible, and we devoted some time to this point in the recent debate.

#### CYPRUS

46. **Mr. Patrick Maitland** asked the Prime Minister whether he will make a statement about Cyprus.

48. **Brigadier Clarke** asked the Prime Minister why it has been decided to negotiate with Archbishop Makarios, whereas in the past it has been clearly stated that no negotiations with him would be opened until he denounced violence.

**Mr. R. A. Butler:** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend hopes to intervene in the debate this evening and to deal then with the position on Cyprus.

**Mr. Maitland:** While thanking my right hon. Friend for that reply, may I ask Mr. Speaker, whether I shall have an opportunity of a supplementary question this evening?

**Mr. Butler:** The answer rather depends on you, Mr. Speaker.

**Brigadier Clarke:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people in this country regard Archbishop Makarios as a murderer and wonder why British Ministers negotiate with him? Does my right hon. Friend realise that Archbishop



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 Mr. ... is a British subject, who should be taken back to Cyprus, tried and, if found guilty, shot?

**Mr. Butler:** These are questions of opinion, but I think that my hon. and gallant Friend, in his supplementary question, should refer back to the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Colonial Secretary on 28th March, 1957, and by the Prime Minister on 19th June, 1958, in which he will see exact statements made in relation to the future and position of the Archbishop.

**Mr. Gaitskell:** Can the right hon. Gentleman say when the Prime Minister is likely to be able to make this statement?

**Mr. Butler:** I left it open because I thought that if it were possible to make a statement early in the debate the Prime Minister would come in at some hour about 7 p.m., but if we are not ready to do so, as the conference is now proceeding, it would be later. What my right hon. Friend wishes to do is to intervene on the subject during the debate and give the House the latest information.

#### GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

47. **Dame Irene Ward** asked the Prime Minister whether he is aware, that in spite of the need to increase production and reduce costs, the action, examples of which have been sent to him by the hon. Member for Tynemouth, of Government Departments such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Fuel and Power, the Board of Trade, and the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, nullifies individual efforts; and if he will call an inter-departmental conference of the Departments concerned with a view to eliminating these delays.

**Mr. R. A. Butler:** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has brought to the notice of the appropriate Ministers the matters raised by my hon. Friend. I do not think that an inter-departmental conference on matters so diverse would really help.

**Dame Irene Ward:** While thanking my right hon. Friend for that Answer, may I ask whether he agrees that the general public are getting frightfully bored about constantly being encouraged to greater

productive efforts when it is impossible to make appointments with the nationalised industries—gas, electricity or any of the others—when there are less and less buses, slower and slower trains, and when all their efforts to comply with the requests made, quite rightly, by the Government are vitiated? Will my right hon. Friend try to ensure that things are improved?

**Mr. Butler:** There are two main parts of my hon. Friend's Question. One relates to Government Departments, in respect of which inquiries have already been put into effect as regards waiting lists at hospitals, outpatients and other difficulties. Certain of my hon. Friend's complaints were directed to the General Post Office. The questions about telephones and the opening hours of post offices have already been taken up. In regard to the nationalised industries, some of the things to which my hon. Friend has referred are day-to-day matters of administration by the industries concerned, so it would be as well if she could take them up with those industries. For the rest, I can assure my hon. Friend that I have read all the correspondence and that the Prime Minister wishes the matters to be energetically pursued on my hon. Friend's representations.

#### CIVIL DEFENCE (POLICY)

50. **Mr. S. Silverman** asked the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to co-ordinate the civil defence policies of the Home Department with those of the Ministry of Defence, so as to obviate the selection, as evacuation areas, of counties containing bomber and rocket sites.

49. **Mr. Baird** asked the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to correlate the civil defence policy of the Home Department with that of the Ministry of Defence, in view of the latter's policy of concentrating active defence measures on air and rocket bases.

**Mr. R. A. Butler:** I have been asked to reply.

I would refer the hon. Members to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mr. Swingle) and the hon. Member for Reading (Mr. Mikardo) on Tuesday last.



**Mr. Silverman:** I have read that Answer, but has the attention of the right hon. Gentleman been called to the reply given to me by the Minister of Defence on 11th February? I will quote one sentence only from it—

“Therefore we could not honestly say to the people of this country that in the present state of scientific knowledge there is any effective means of defending the country as a whole.”—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 11th February, 1959; Vol. 599, c. 1174.]

Does this mean, therefore, that it is the policy of both Departments to transfer as many of the civil population of this country as they can to the immediate neighbourhood of the sites, which must necessarily be the prime object of the enemy's attack?

**Mr. Butler:** No, Sir. There was a Question down to me by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Baird) which I was going to answer verbally but which will be published in the OFFICIAL REPORT. In that Answer I shall state that a re-examination of the question of evacuation is taking place with the local authorities. That would be some consolation to the hon. Gentleman if he thought we were going to adopt a policy such as he suggested, because such consultation would undoubtedly result in a more commonsense solution than that which he suggests.

#### PUBLIC SERVICE PENSIONERS

51. **Dr. King** asked the Prime Minister what reply he has given to the Public Service Pensioners Council to its request for improvements in the pensions of public service pensioners.

**Mr. R. A. Butler:** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has had no recent representations from the Public Service Pensioners Council. I understand, however, that it has made an approach to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and that arrangements are being made for my hon. and learned Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to receive a deputation.

**Dr. King:** While thanking the right hon. Gentleman for that sympathetic

reply, may I ask him if he is aware that there are pensioners in the country who are too old to qualify for full National Insurance benefits and that old superannuated public servants today draw superannuation which is fantastically different from that earned by people in the same occupation who are much younger? Will he, therefore, give sympathetic consideration to the representations made by the Public Service Pensioners Council?

**Mr. Butler:** Yes, Sir, and I hope that the Council will bring out points such as this when it meets my hon. and learned Friend.

**Sir G. Nicholson:** Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that there is already accord amongst all Members of this House that there should be some measure of justice for these elderly people, and that this would be the barest justice, because the pensions they are drawing now have very much smaller purchasing power than they had at the time when they were originally planned?

**Mr. Butler:** Yes, Sir. That is why my hon. and learned Friend is to receive a deputation.

#### TRADE AND COMMERCE

##### Dutch Bulbs

60. **Captain Orr** asked the President of the Board of Trade to what extent it is possible, under the present regulations, for the import quota on Dutch bulbs to be avoided by the device of importing them by way of the Irish Republic.

**The President of the Board of Trade (Sir David Eccles):** The present regulations do not permit imports of Dutch bulbs in excess of the quota, and I have no evidence that these regulations are being evaded by shipment via the Irish Republic.

##### Fish (Exports)

61. **Mr. Hector Hughes** asked the President of the Board of Trade if he will specify the weight, value and kind of fish landed in British ports which were exported to Commonwealth and foreign countries, respectively, during each of the last ten years, indicating from which parts of Great Britain they were exported.



QUESTIONS TO THE PRIME MINISTER

20. Since 1959 Prime Minister's Questions have been taken from 3.15 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, in place of the previous arrangements whereby they began at No. 40 and, before that, at No. 45. A consequence of this development is that more time is devoted to Questions to the Prime Minister than to any other Minister, and it may be that the establishment of Prime Minister's Questions as a set occasion on two days a week has contributed to the undoubted increase in the desire of Members to address Questions to him.\* Questions tabled for answer by him relate not only to the Prime Minister's own actions and direct responsibilities in his co-ordinating function as head of the Government, but also to Departmental matters which Members consider to be so important that they should be answered by the Prime Minister. It has been the practice of Prime Ministers to transfer these Departmental Questions to the appropriate Ministers for answer by them.

NB, this change was not in fact implemented until 1961.

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21. The response of some Members to the transfer of Questions which they wish to put to the Prime Minister has been to devise Questions of a kind that cannot easily be transferred, and then to seek to make their point in a supplementary Question. An example of such a device is a Question asking the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to a particular town. If the visit asked for were, for example, to a military establishment or to a hospital, it would invite transfer. By being deliberately vague a Question provides no evidence of an appropriate Minister to whom it can be transferred and, by the same token, no indication of the supplementary Question with which the Prime Minister will be asked to deal. The Question is sufficiently meaningless to allow the Member to ask any supplementary Question he considers to be topical on the day it is reached. Your Committee believe that there is a general feeling in the House that such a situation is unsatisfactory.

22. The principal cause of discontent amongst Members appears to be the contrast between the difficulty in tabling a straightforward Question to the Prime Minister which will not be transferred, and the ease with which almost any proposition can be put to him in the form of a supplementary Question. The desire of some Members, however, that any Question they address to the Prime Minister should be answered by him is not one that Your Committee consider can reasonably be met.

23. Your Committee have considered what other remedies might be possible. The Principal Clerk of the Table Office drew attention (Ev., p. 56) to the practice in the Canadian House of Commons whereby Questions may be put without notice, and an extempore exchange takes place between Members and Ministers on such issues as are considered important by the Members called. While such a procedure cures the difficulty of the orderliness of the Question on the Paper by removing the need to have one at all, Your Committee consider that it would not be likely to improve the effectiveness or Parliamentary control of the executive. For the House to make the best use of its opportunity to question the Prime Minister of the day it must give him the chance to provide considered and properly-researched answers to its questioning. Supplementary Questions already provide an occasion

\* See, e.g., H.C. Deb. (1970-71) 810, c. 805.



for a battle of wits, which the House enjoys. To introduce a wholly extempore Question period would be to surrender to the tendency to trivialise Prime Minister's Question time, which Your Committee deplore. Furthermore, they believe that such a system would place an unfair burden on Mr. Speaker in selecting who should be called to ask Questions.

24. To the extent that "vague" Questions displace Questions genuinely concerned with the Prime Minister's responsibilities, it might be considered that an appropriate way of reducing the discrepancy between the original Question and the supplementary would be by a stricter application of the rules of relevance. For reasons adduced by the Principal Clerk of the Table Office (Ev., p. 55), and for the same reason that supplementary Questions frequently do go wider than the answers theoretically permit—that is to say that a supplementary Question cannot be ruled out of order until it has been asked, and that to refuse a Minister a reply would not normally be reasonable—Your Committee do not believe that the Chair should be asked to apply different standards to supplementary Questions to the Prime Minister than are applied to other supplementary Questions. A small change which might assist the House and the Prime Minister in supplementary Questions would be for Members asking about a Minister's speech, or for a speech by the Prime Minister to be placed in the Library, to include in their Questions a precise indication of the subject-matter in the speech to which they wish to refer. If Members wished to raise the implications of the speech as a whole, they would be free, as now, simply to refer to the speech in general terms. Your Committee commend this change of practice to the House.

25. Your Committee observe the frequency with which the Prime Minister's Question time is largely occupied by supplementary Questions and answers arising from identical questions placed on the Order Paper by a number of Members. They believe that it would improve the effectiveness of this period of Parliamentary business if Mr. Speaker made it clear that he would not necessarily call for a supplementary Question every Member who had placed an identical Question on the Order Paper. This would enable more subjects to be answered in the time available. In this connection, they draw attention to a practice instituted by Mr. Speaker Hylton-Foster in 1965. In the light of evidence that Members were deliberately tabling Questions similar to ones already on the Paper, he said that he proposed, while doing his best to preserve a fair balance, to regard Members whose Questions had late numbers, when Questions were answered together, as having no more reason to catch his eye for a supplementary Question than Members who had no Questions on the Paper. (H.C. Deb. (1964-65) 708, c. 1281.) Your Committee have no doubt that many identical Questions are tabled on the same day without being deliberately based on Questions already on the Paper. They nevertheless feel that it is unreasonable for every Member who has his Question answered with others (on 15th June 18 such Questions were answered together) to expect to be called to ask a supplementary, and they hope that Mr. Speaker will exercise his discretion in limiting the number of supplementary Questions arising from identical Questions irrespective of when the Questions were originally tabled.

26. The rules for Questions do not permit the asking of a Question to which an answer has been refused in the current Session (May, p. 327). Your Committee would regret any extension beyond its present limited use of this power to block Questions by means of refusal to answer, and they believe that any tendency to do so would be likely to result in a competition in ingenuity amongst Members anxious to evade its effects.

27. Apart from the changes in practice indicated above, Your Committee are unable to propose any procedural changes that would relieve the current pressures on Prime Minister's Question time. To the extent that these pressures reflect the wish of the House increasingly to hold the Prime Minister responsible for all aspects of the work of his Administration, they could only be relieved by an extension of the time available for him to answer. Your Committee do not consider that the House would wish such an extension made at the expense of the time for Ministers with departmental responsibilities. They therefore recommend that for an experimental period the time of Prime Minister's Questions on Tuesdays shall be extended by fifteen minutes until 3.45 p.m.



## PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

The purpose of this talk and this session is first, to enable us to tell you something about Prime Minister's Questions, its background and how we organise for them within Number 10; second to meet and thank the people whom we oppress throughout the session; third, to explain what we expect and hope for in briefing; and fourth, to enable you to ask questions and generally complain about our iniquities.

First the history of Prime Minister's Questions:

Until 1902, Questions to all Ministers were taken in the order in which they were handed in. As a courtesy to Mr. Gladstone, however, it had been decided in 1881 to place PM's Questions last. Not surprisingly, they were seldom reached. So in 1902, Questions to the Prime Minister began at No. 45, on Mondays to Thursdays. This remained until 1961 but in the early '50's, Sir Winston Churchill decided he would only answer on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In 1961 the present pattern of PM's Questions at 3.15 on Tuesday and Thursday began. It was at that point that the evolution of PMQs from a leisurely exercise in which the Prime Minister answered one or two rather harmless questions to the present gladiatorial combat.

Even so, PM's Questions in the early 1960s was a very different event from today. All the Questions were substantive - relating to particular responsibilities of the Prime Minister, such as co-ordination of policy or major international meetings. The Leader of the Opposition seldom intervened, although that began to change when Harold Wilson became Leader of the Opposition and saw PMQs as a means of demonstrating his Parliamentary dominance. In the 1960s, however, there began to appear the "open" or indirect Question. This took one of two forms: either, to ask the Prime Minister if he would visit a particular place or, slightly later, the familiar engagements Question. The purpose of these Questions was originally to enable the MP to ask the Prime Minister about particular aspects



of Government policy such as the NHS. If a direct Question on one aspect of Government policy was tabled, the Prime Minister tended to transfer it to the appropriate Minister: the open Questions was a chance to get round the transfer system.

That is not the reason for the predominance of the open Questions today: this Prime Minister has made it clear that she will not, save in exceptional circumstances, transfer a Question. The reasons are two-fold: first, it enables the Questioner to follow up the open Question which he tabled two weeks previously with a topical supplementary; and second, in the case of the Opposition, it enables them to conceal the supplementary in order to score points off the Prime Minister.

The dominance of the open Question is a very recent phenomenon. Even as recently as 1971/72 less than 10% of oral Questions were open; by the mid-seventies, the figure had risen to 50%; and today the overwhelming majority of Questions tabled are open. Since October, almost 1000 oral Questions were tabled and only 7% were substantive. Only 3 substantive Questions were reached.

All this means that PMQs has changed radically over the last 10 years. In the 1971/72 session a Select Committee commented "for the House to make the best use of its opportunity to question the Prime Minister of the day, it must give him the chance to provide considered and properly-researched answers to its questioning. Supplementary Questions already provide an occasion for a battle of wits, which the House enjoys. To introduce a wholly extempore Question period would be to surrender to the tendency to trivialise PM's Question time, which your Committee would deplore".

In fact it is widely suggested that the House is dissatisfied with the form of PMQs as it has evolved. I suspect the truth is rather different. For example, the fact that so



few substantive questions are actually tabled does not suggest any great longing for a return to the previous arrangement; nor does the fact that some 160 MPs have participated in Questions so far this session - about a third of backbenchers.

I doubt whether there will be any changes in the near future; certainly the PM would not wish to seek any change herself. It is a matter for the House.

The result is, of course, that PM's Questions is totally unlike Departments Questions.

- (i) It lasts for much longer in total - two hours a month instead of one; more important, it is much more often - 8 times a month not once. And you have to do as much preparation for 15 minutes of open questions as you would for 45. That means that PMQ is a dominant feature of the PM's working week.
- (ii) The fact that the Order Paper is relatively unimportant. In 1971/72, 7 PMQs were reached on average; now it is 3. Most Departments go faster than that.
- (iii) The absence of foreknowledge of the Questions: apart from Conservative backbenchers in the first four or five, we have literally no knowledge of the supplementaries. And they cover a very wide range as the handout makes clear.
- (iv) As a consequence of that, the PM is expected to have a vast, almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the background to Government policy. She cannot get away with bland answers; nor would that be her style.
- (v) Most important, PMQs is the centrepiece of the Party battle. Departmental questions are, by comparison, mild exchanges of news. PMQs are held to be the litmus test of the Parliamentary performances of the PM and the Leader of the Opposition. The House is

/ always



always crowded; good and bad performances can raise or depress Party morale accordingly.

- (vi) Finally, PMQs is always news; answers are on the tapes 20 minutes after; on the early evening news; in the papers. Every answer - even the lightest - is treated as a major news item eg the answer about the f1 note.

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All that has implications for the way/we make on you.

Let me first tell you something about the way we organise ourselves. First, on Mondays and Wednesdays we show the PM overnight a folder of briefing on the main subjects which are likely to come up the next day. We are trying to do this more recently: I know that this is a disruption to the normal routine but it should give officials more time and avoid last minute panics on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. I will try to avoid asking for both.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the Questions team gets in at an ungodly hour to check the press, yesterday's Hansard and the day's Order Paper. From 9-9.30 we meet the PM to discuss the issues of the day. The rest of the morning we spend commissioning and writing briefing notes. From 1-3.10 we spend in continuous session with the PM running over the briefing. In this whole process we work very closely with the Political Office.

All these factors: the nature of PM's Questions, the way we operate and, indeed, the PM's own style determine what we ask for.

(i) Quality

Because anything can come up, we inevitably have to ask for more than can conceivably come up. Inevitably, not all of it is used; but nearly all of it is seen by the PM either during the briefing process or overnight. And all of it is seen by the Press Office and the Political Office. What is more, it is cumulative; the PM has a very good memory and can recall briefing she has seen in the past.

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(ii) Timing

As I have said, we are trying to ask for briefing earlier. But, in the nature of things, we have to react to media stories on the day in question. Departments generally do remarkably well to get briefing to us on time. But can I make three pleas. First, some Departments always wait for Ministerial clearance before sending us copy. This can be a real problem, especially on Thursday if there is a long Cabinet. Don't wait. Send it to us in raw form and telephone any amendments. Second, make use of the telephone if you do not have much time. Third, try to avoid pleas of lack of messengers.

(iii) Length

When the subject is relatively simple, keep it on one page. If it is complete, the Prime Minister prefers completeness, including all the relevant facts and figures. The Prime Minister has a lawyer's preference for source material, e.g. if you are quoting an official report, give us a photocopy of the page.

(iv) Style and Content

PMQs as different from Departmental questions. It is more Party-oriented; it is more combative. Always include something positive in the line to take; try to include some material, comparative if possible, on the Government's record. May I give an example: throughout the entire period of the row about NHS cuts, none of the DHSS briefing included the devastating counter argument that the last Government reduced provision for the NHS in real terms in 1976/7 and 1977/8. It emerged only in the answer to a written PQ asked by of all people, Michael Meacher.

I know that it is not your job to provide the briefing but I would be grateful if you could keep your eyes open for that kind of material and draw it to our attention.

/May I



May I mention one other point: the vital importance of accuracy. If a departmental Minister makes a factual mistake he can normally correct it quietly. Mistakes made by the Prime Minister or in her name rarely can. For heavens sake, get the figures right.

(v) Layout

Always include a line to take and a background note: make it clear which is which. Try to avoid, wherever possible, sending classified material, especially on the same page as lines to take. We can't use classified material - so don't send it unless essential. Finally, the Prime Minister has to find her place quickly amongst a mass of material and then read it. Use a large type face therefore: ordinary type is impossible and we have to re-type it. The Home Office is a particular offender.

Finally, if you ever get frustrated by the apparently futile demands for briefing made on you, let me reassure you that it has two additional functions. First, PMQs is an awe-inspiring occasion: it is all about confidence and, to feel confident, the Prime Minister must know that she has covered every likely subject. Second, PMQs is one way of ensuring that the Prime Minister knows what is going on.

In conclusion, may I thank you for all you do; apologise when we seem unco-ordinated, such as when we commission briefing simultaneously through Parliamentary and Private Offices; and to ask you for your questions and suggestions as to how we could make your lives easier and, much more important, vice versa.