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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-930 7022

D/S of S/126/85

7th November 1985

*Jan Alison*

*NPM*

THE PARLIAMENTARY MARITIME GROUP

Earlier this year the Parliamentary Maritime Group invited the then Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, to address them. As is the form with such invitations to the Chiefs of Staff, this was referred to the Defence Secretary, who decided that it should be refused. The attached correspondence between Sir Edward du Cann, Chairman of the Group, and the Defence Secretary ensued.

Having considered Sir Edward's latest letter, Mr Heseltine is now inclined to allow the Group's request, although it is not now entirely clear, from the penultimate paragraph of Sir Edward's letter, what he would be specifically agreeing to. However, before agreeing to, say, the principle that a Service Chief of Staff should address the Group, Mr Heseltine would wish to know that he was not establishing a precedent which other Departments might subsequently find awkward or inconvenient and he would be grateful for the Lord Privy Seal's views in particular.

By way of background, it might be helpful if I set out the Ministry of Defence's general policy on serving members of the Armed Forces participating in 'political activities'. It is of course a long established principle that the Services must be, and be seen to be, neutral in political matters and that their members, in their capacity as Service personnel, should not therefore participate actively in matters of political controversy. As an extension of this, it would be improper for individual members of the Services to be personally identified in public with any line in conflict with the policy of the Government of the day. There will be occasions, however, when Service personnel can, and should, make a contribution to public knowledge on the basis of specialised information and experience gained in the course of their official duties. Thus, Ministers here agreed that the Head of the Royal Navy's Hydrographic Service, a serving Rear Admiral, should address the Parliamentary Maritime Group last December, to describe the work of that Service. The criteria which Ministers apply in deciding whether or not to agree to participation by Servicemen in

Ms Alison Smith  
Private Secretary to the Lord Privy Seal

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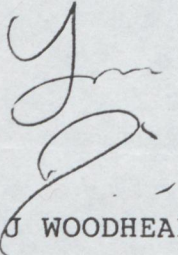
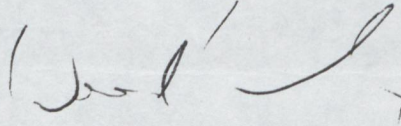


activities such as these include the risk to national security; the possibility of embarrassment to the Government in the conduct of its policies; and the possibility of bringing into question the impartiality of the Services. The extent to which this general policy and these criteria are relevant to the Parliamentary Maritime Group's invitation to a Chief of Staff and to which a meeting of an all-party Parliamentary Group constitutes a "political activity" are also matters for Ministerial judgement.

One further factor of which the Lord Privy Seal may wish to be aware is that the Defence Secretary has agreed to a request from the Defence Select Committee to see Admiral Fieldhouse, in his new capacity as Chief of the Defence Staff, on 27th November. Mr Heseltine has agreed this on the basis that the session will be held entirely in private and will be off the record.

It would be helpful to have any observations by the time the Defence Secretary returns from the Far East, at the end of next week.

I am copying this letter to Tim Flesher (No 10), Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), Colin Budd (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Edmund Hosker (Department of Trade and Industry), Paul Pegler (Treasury), William Fittall (Home Office), Ian Hughes (Department of Education and Science), Jonathan Cunliffe (Department of Transport) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

  
  
(D J WOODHEAD)

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ESBG



70 WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AS

01-233 8319

*From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service*

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A085/3015

21 November 1985

*Dear David*

Parliamentary Maritime Group

I have seen the replies that you have received from Alison Smith and Michael Gilbertson to your letter of 7 November.

Sir Robert Armstrong is concerned that to agree to this invitation might be seen as creating a precedent if the Group were subsequently to invite civil servants to attend. The guidance currently given in the Heads of Departments Personal Handbook makes clear that civil servants should not attend meetings of Groups of this kind, except in the presence of and in direct support of their Minister. The reason for this is that, unlike Select Committees, proceedings in these Groups are not covered by established conventions and standing orders and the Groups may well be the Parliamentary dimension of a pressure group.

Slightly different considerations may apply to military personnel in relation to essentially technical matters such as the example you quote. But the attendance of the Chief of Defence Staff, not accompanying a Minister, would appear more akin to the attendance of civil servants in some circumstances, and might run the same risk that issues of policy and resource allocation might be raised which should be for Ministers.

Sir Robert wanted you to be aware of this background, before final decisions are taken on Sir John Fieldhouse's attendance.

I am copying this letter to recipients of yours.

*Yours ever*

*Michael Stark*

(M C Stark)

Private Secretary

David Woodhead Esq

Parliament; Maritime Group; ~~Oct~~'85  
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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

15 November 1985

*M  
15/11/85*

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 7 November about an invitation from the Parliamentary Maritime Group to Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse to address them.

The Lord Privy Seal's view is that the acceptance of this invitation would not establish any awkward precedent so far as Select Committees are concerned, insofar as they normally have already an unrestricted power (which, if supported by the House, they can enforce) to call for any persons to appear before them to give evidence.

On the more general point, he would see the question of whether or not this meeting constitutes a 'political activity' within the general policy relating to the involvement of members of the Armed Forces as being a matter at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Defence: personally, however, he would hope that the invitation could be accepted.

I am copying this letter to Tim Flesher (No 10), Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), Colin Budd (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Edmund Hosker (Department of Trade and Industry), Paul Pegler (Treasury), William Fittall (Home Office), Ian Hughes (Department of Education and Science), Jonathan Cunliffe (Department of Transport) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

*Yours,  
Alison*

ALISON SMITH  
Private Secretary

D Woodhead Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Secretary of State for Defence

Parliamentary Maritime Corp: PARLIAM  
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Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

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15 November 1985

Miss Alison Smith  
Private Secretary to the  
Lord Privy Seal  
Privy Council Office  
Whitehall SW1

*Dear Alison,*

**THE PARLIAMENTARY MARITIME GROUP**

I have seen the letter of 7 November from David Woodhead seeking the Lord Privy Seal's agreement to the request from the Parliamentary Maritime Group to be addressed by the First Sea Lord.

My Secretary of State is not sure that the analogy drawn by Sir Edward du Cann with the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee is exact. Some parts of the Group's terms of reference seem to indicate that the Group could be a pro-maritime pressure Group. We would certainly not wish to be faced with a situation where civil servants from this Department were invited to speak and for the Group to cite the First Sea Lord's appearance as a precedent. We would be reluctant therefore for the Defence Secretary to accede to the Group's request unless the Lord Privy Seal is satisfied that a clear distinction can be made between the First Sea Lord appearing before the Committee and a civil servant doing so.

I am copying this letter to D Woodhead (MOD) and to the recipients of his letter.

*Yours ever,*

*Michael*

MICHAEL GILBERTSON  
Private Secretary

PARLIAMENT; Parliamentary Maritime Group: Nov 85

