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RES 83 0508/0012/006

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Any comments  
or suggestions  
on the last  
paragraph?

From: Parliamentary Clerk  
9 November 1983

JZC 10/xi

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DEPARTMENTAL SELECT COMMITTEES

Before the departmental Select Committees resume their work it may be useful to set out where we stand and what the next steps are likely to be.

Before the General Election there were five reports on Home Office subjects to which Government responses were owed.

1. Public Order (published 5 September 1980)

This was one of the earliest Home Affairs Committee reports. The Committee were not particularly proud of it and have not demanded a reply but the often-deferred White Paper on Public Order would provide an opportunity to make a formal response in due course.

2. Ethnic and Racial Questions in the Census (11 May 1983)

The response to this report is being co-ordinated by the OPCS and it is hoped that the draft reply will be ready for submission to Ministers in December.

3. Prison Education (25 April 1983)

The reply to this report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee has been agreed at official level and has been circulated to members of H Committee for comment by 21 November, with the aim of publishing the reply in mid-December.

4. Representation of the People Acts (29 April 1983)

Ministers have agreed that the Government reply to this report should be published early next year in the form of a White Paper following consultation with opposition parties that has already been set in train.

5. Nationality Fees (19 May 1983)

A full submission on the reply to this report is now with Ministers. It is envisaged that the reply should be ready for publication before the Christmas adjournment.

The new Committees will expect Government replies to their predecessors reports soon after their appointment and I suggest that once the new Committees are set up the Home Secretary should write to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee to welcome his appointment and let him know the proposed timing of the replies on 2, 4 and 5 above.

Although selection for membership of the Committees will take place shortly, the motions to approve membership may well be opposed until there has been an opportunity for debate, in which case the Committees may not sit for two or three weeks.

Under Standing Orders the Home Affairs Select Committee will continue to have 11 members but the balance on the Committee will probably alter to seven Conservative members including the Chairman (instead of six), <sup>four</sup> Labour members and one Alliance member. At its first meeting the Committee is expected to elect its Chairman (?Sir Edward Gardner); decide on the function and membership of its sub-Committee, and consider whether to continue with the previous Committee's inquiries into drugs, and the Chinese community in Britain. Home Office written evidence on drugs was submitted before the Election and written evidence on the Chinese community in Britain was in the course of preparation. Unless there is a completely new Committee it seems likely that these inquiries will be continued and that the sub-Committee will continue to deal with race relations and immigration for the time being. However, before resuming these inquiries, or embarking on new ones, the Committee may decide to invite the Home Secretary and senior officials to give evidence on a broad range of Home Office subjects as the original Committee did in December 1979 when first appointed. Copies of the minutes of that evidence are attached.

Whether or not the Committee continues with the partly completed inquiries they are likely to give early consideration to what their future inquiries should cover. The Committee have considered in the past a number of possible subjects of inquiry which they have not yet pursued, including the operation of the Gaming Board, the Prison Medical Services and the constitutional position of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Although the Committee has not so far been very receptive to outside suggestions as to what it should consider there would be nothing lost by feeding in to the Clerk at this stage subjects which Ministers feel could helpfully be examined by the Committee. One possible candidate is a review of the procedures for revising Parliamentary boundaries which was being pressed for by Mr Hattersley before the Election.