

PRIME MINISTER

THE MOTION FOR THE WESTLAND DEBATE

Following discussions with Sir Robert Armstrong, the Chief Whip suggests that the motion for the Westland Debate should be:-

"That this House approves the Government's response (Cmnd 9916) to the Third and Fourth Reports from the Select Committee on Defence, while recognising that the application of the principles of accountability described in the response to the work of Select Committees will need to be the subject of further consideration."

Apparently, the Opposition want to open the debate with Denzil Davies and wind with John Smith. The Chief Whip will be suggesting that George Younger opens for the Government and Paul Channon closes.

If you are content with the terms of the motion, the Chief Whip will now show it to Terence Higgins. It is clearly important that he should be content with it since if he can speak in favour, the Select Committee lobby in the House on the Government's side will probably follow him. Hence the reference at the end of the motion to the need for further consideration of ".... the application of the principles of accountability described in the response to the work of Select Committees" ...". NB. Here it is the application of the principles which will be considered further, not the principles themselves.

Content with the draft motion?

N.L. Wicks

21 October 1986

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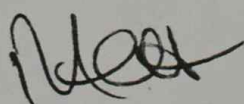
From: R A C HEWES

Date: 20 October 1986

MR McLEAN

WESTLAND MOTION

1. We discussed on Friday the terms and handling of the Government motion for the debate on 29 October. I agreed to have a shot at a possible form of words for the motion so that we could have a further talk about it later today.
2. I think we are agreed on the parameters for the motion. On the one hand it must be firm and clear in seeking the House's approval for both the Government's substantive decisions on Westland (dealt with in the Third Report) and its response to the criticisms (in the Fourth Report) on the Government's handling of the matter, including Sir Robert's inquiry. On the other hand it needs to avoid being unnecessarily provocative to Select Committee chairmen on the subject of civil servants' accountability without, however, suggesting that the Government is having second thoughts on the matter.
3. As we recognised, the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and the Liaison Committee, of both of which Terence Higgins is chairman, are likely to want an opportunity to give further thought to this whole subject. Nor is it necessarily unhelpful for the debate on accountability to be continued in this way, since it offers the prospects that in the process some of the wilder statements can be shown up for what they are.
4. I am not sanguine though that either Committee would come up with a prescription that could be adopted. I believe that we would stand a fair chance of either Committee being convinced that the final sentences of paragraph 44 of the Westland reply do no more than seek to restore matters to their former state before recent departures by certain Committees: But I fear that they would argue that in the light of Westland that former state is no longer acceptable and would persist in pressing the case for some form of direct accountability of civil servants to Parliament.
5. For that reason - as well as because it smacks of second thoughts - I think it would be unwise for the motion to say anything which could be taken as the Government remitting the subject to a Select Committee. Any suggestion for a further Select Committee report on the matter should be allowed to emerge during the debate, so that the Minister winding up the debate can acknowledge the appropriateness of this without implying that the Government feels a need for it or would be in any way committed to its conclusions.
6. All that by way of preamble to explain my thinking behind the draft motion attached. It is not at all elegant and can no doubt be improved by others, but I hope that it strikes the right sort of balance between the different ingredients without offering hostages to fortune. I shall be happy to discuss if you think that would be helpful.



R A C HEWES

Suggested Draft Motion for Westland Debate

"That this House approves both the Government's response to the Third Report from the Defence Committee on the defence implications of the future of Westland plc and the Government's comments on its decision-making in its response to the Fourth Report from the Defence Committee and notes the Government's comments on the accountability of Ministers and civil servants and their relationships with Select Committees, recognising also the related comments on this matter in the Seventh Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and the Government's response to that report."