

Prime Minister ②

I hope this can be achieved

AT 10/1



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-233 3000

9 January 1984

The Rt. Hon. Peter Walker MBE MP
Secretary of State for Energy

Stan P...

ms

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY

We need to consider quickly how to handle the enquiry into electricity and gas prices on which the Select Committee on Energy have embarked.

As you know, the Treasury has received a request from the Committee for answers to a number of questions, most of which are in identical terms to those which they have addressed to your own Department; and the Committee have asked Treasury officials to appear before them to give oral evidence on Thursday 19 January, in advance of your own appearance on 1 February. Our officials are already in touch about the written questions, but we need also to agree on matters of handling.

Whatever differences there may have been on recent issues, I am sure you will agree that the overriding need now is to present a coherent view of Government policy in this area, on the basis of the decisions Cabinet has recently taken, and to resist firmly any attempt by members of the Committee to seek to expose divisions within the Government. In my view, those objects would be best served if we were to submit written replies to the Committee's questions jointly in the names of the Department of Energy and the Treasury wherever the questions to our Departments are in substance identical. Those questions addressed solely to the Treasury or the Department of Energy could then be answered by the relevant Department in each case. I hope you will agree. I cannot see that the Committee would have any cause to object; indeed the parallel letters from the Clerk to the Committee recognise that joint answers would be appropriate on some questions.

Similarly, I think much the preferable course would be for our two Departments to appear jointly before the Committee to give oral evidence. This would make it easier to maintain a common front and would reduce the risk of misunderstanding or differences of emphasis which might otherwise occur. I appreciate that the Committee's invitation is to you personally, while that to the Treasury is addressed to officials. But I do not see that this need prove to be an insuperable obstacle if we are agreed that a joint approach is desirable.

Thus, provided you see no objection, I should like to suggest to the Committee that when Treasury officials appear before them later this month, they should be joined by one or more of your own officials. We should invite the Committee to regard this opening session as an initial hearing, supplying the necessary background for your own appearance in February, when they would no doubt expect to concentrate more on matters of policy. As with joint written



evidence, I do not think the Energy Committee would have any cause to complain if the position was properly explained to them. They would still be having two Sessions; with Treasury witnesses appearing at the first, though not alone.

If you agree that this is a sensible way to proceed, my officials will have a word with the Clerk to the Energy Committee to ask him to put these proposals to the Chairman, Ian Lloyd. If he was at all unhappy about the idea, one or other of us might need to have a word with him. But I hope that would not be necessary. Similarly, if you find any difficulty in what I am proposing, we could perhaps have a word.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister and to Willie Whitelaw.

NIGEL LAWSON

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Lawson', written over the typed name.

CG/NO

Prime Minister ^②
Relations are improving
HT 13/1

01 211 6402

MT

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Treasury Chambers
Parliament Street
LONDON SW1P 3AG

13 January 1984

Nigel Lawson
SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY

attached

Thank you for your letter concerning the Select Committee on Energy.
I agree of course that our objective must be to present a coherent view
of Government policy.

I am perfectly happy for my officials to attend with yours. However it
is worth considering whether a strong request by you that this happens might
not be exploited by the Committee. If they look upon it as a major request
they may well endeavour to use the presence of both lots of officials at
the meeting to try and expose some differences of emphasis.

It strikes me that if the presence of my officials with yours could be
presented as an unimportant event, one in which ours are accompanying
yours due to their detailed expertise and the fact that in any case they
always work with your officials, it might have less impact on the attitude
of the Committee.

I am quite happy for you to decide whatever way you wish to handle this.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister and to Willie Whitelaw.

Peter Walker
PETER WALKER

13 JAN 1984

