

*I agree with the  
but clearly the LPS Larkin a  
more relaxed here.  
I should be most unhappy  
y. 'hard' documents about this with Lord President, SS Defence  
were to be released. Sir Robert Armstrong proposer? or would you  
prefer simply to express a view? **FERS***

Ref. A084/792

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister

Agree to have a talk

The Secretary of State for Defence has sent you copies of his  
correspondence with the Lord Privy Seal about the position of  
Mr Antony Preston as a Special Adviser to the Select Committee on  
Defence.

12.3.

2. Mr Preston is a working journalist, on the editorial panel  
of "Jane's Defence Weekly". This is a new publication, working  
very hard to establish itself. In the nature of the case the  
editorial staff will be seeking to build up information and  
establish contacts on as wide a footing as possible. There is  
some difference of view as to whether he has been retained as a  
Special Adviser for one inquiry or on a more permanent basis.

3. The usual inquiries have yielded nothing to suggest that  
Mr Preston is someone to whom access to classified information  
should be denied. There are no grounds for objecting on security  
grounds to his employment as a Special Adviser to the Select  
Committee.

4. Nonetheless the use of a working journalist poses two problems:

- (1) he would find it virtually impossible not to use  
for journalistic purposes at some future time  
sensitive knowledge acquired as a Special Adviser  
to the Select Committee;
- (2) as a Special Adviser he would have access to  
material which would never be made available to  
him as a journalist, or to any other journalist;  
and that could create problems with the rest of  
Fleet Street.

5. There is no precedent for this problem. The Select Committee  
on Defence used Chapman Pincher as a Special Adviser for its  
inquiry into relations with the media during the South Atlantic  
War; but that was rather different.





6. It seems to me that there is a good deal of substance in the Secretary of State for Defence's concern. Given that the Government cannot direct the Select Committee as to whom it should or should not employ as a Special Adviser, the only way of resolving the difficulty would appear to be for the Chairman of the Committee (Sir Humphrey Atkins) to be told that the Committee's use of a working journalist creates a difficult situation for the Government, and he should be aware that, so long as a working journalist is employed in that role, the Government will feel obliged not to give the Committee any information which it would not be prepared to release to the press.

7. Such a line would no doubt be extremely unwelcome to the Committee, and could lead to a Parliamentary row, which the press would be bound to highlight.

8. You may wish to discuss this with the Lord President, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip. The point is one of general significance, and it may be that the Lord Privy Seal should discuss it with the Chairman of the Liaison Committee.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

12 March 1984



10 DOWNING STREET

MR. BARCLAY

Could you please arrange for a talk about this. You might have a word with Richard Mottram about the timetable. Could it be done by inviting the Secretary of State for Defence to join the meeting at 1215 hrs on Monday, 26 March for part of the time? Or should we try to do it earlier at the end of Cabinet?

FERB  
....

14 March, 1984

CF

Meeting arranged for  
after Cabinet tomorrow.

DMS  
14/3



CONFIDENTIAL



KUE

ew

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

14 March, 1984

The Prime Minister has seen the exchange of letters between your Secretary of State and the Lord Privy Seal about the position of Mr. Antony Preston as Special Adviser to the Select Committee. The Prime Minister takes the view that there is a good deal of substance in the Secretary of State for Defence's concern; and she would be most unhappy about making classified material available to a committee which employs a working journalist as a Special Adviser. On the other hand, she recognises that this could create a difficult Parliamentary situation.

The Prime Minister would like to discuss the problem with the Lord President, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip; and we will arrange a meeting accordingly.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), David Heyhoe (Lord Privy Seal's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

E. E. R. BUTLER

R. Mottram, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence

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cc P.C.

R. Butler

A + C 73.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALLING 01-218 6169.

Note: I have spoken to Sir Robert Armstrong who will advise.

6th March 1984

FRB  
7.3.

D/S of S/PS/22/7

BF

*John Biffen*

attached

Thank you for your advice in your letter of 22nd February about the position of Mr Antony Preston as Special Adviser to the Select Committee on Defence.

I note what you say about not making any formal approach to the Committee, and I quite share your wish to avoid damaging our relationship with them. Nevertheless, there are elements of all this which still give me some cause for concern, and these are linked to the central issue of the safety of classified material passed to the Committee. In addition, I am conscious of the potential difficulties arising from the position of Mr Preston as a working journalist and our relationship vis-à-vis his colleagues in Fleet Street.

I am, I must confess, still less than happy about the possible conflict of interest to which I referred in my earlier letter, whereby Mr Preston will surely find it virtually impossible not to use for journalistic purposes at some future time sensitive knowledge acquired during his appointment as a Special Adviser. I accept that we might seek to minimise his access to such material by withholding particularly sensitive documents from the Committee, but with respect I think there is a wider issue of principle at stake. His access to any classified

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP





material could result in the unacceptable risk that he will use it in future articles, to the embarrassment not only of me and my colleagues here in the Ministry of Defence, but also of the Defence Committee themselves. This, surely, would also have the effect of souring our relationship with them.

But I wonder if we do not also have to bear in mind the likely attitude of the rest of Fleet Street towards the very special access being afforded to one of their number, and their perception of the possible problems posed by the conflict of interest which I have suggested exists? There is perhaps an even more hazardous situation here, involving the somewhat fragile relationship between the Government and Fleet Street based on mutual trust and co-operation. I cannot help thinking that this relationship is bound to suffer when Mr Preston's journalist colleagues perceive that he is being given very favourable treatment which they do not enjoy, and is having access to material which would not ever be made available to them.

In view of the significance of all this, I would welcome the further general views of my colleagues, perhaps, if an opportunity arises, within the margins of an early Cabinet; and I am therefore sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister (together with a copy of our earlier correspondence) and to Willie Whitelaw, John Wakeham and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours  
Michael

Michael Heseltine





PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

22 February 1984

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 10 February <sup>attached</sup> about the appointment of Mr Antony Preston as Special Adviser to the Select Committee on Defence.

Of course I understand your concern about the difficulty Mr Preston will face in maintaining a clear distinction between the information he acquires as Adviser to the Committee and that available to him as a Journalist. I am conscious of your need to satisfy yourself, when deciding whether to disclose information to a Select Committee, that there is no unacceptable risk to National Security.

As you know, however, Select Committees are entitled to choose their own Advisers and they are jealous of their independence. I would, therefore, strongly advise that you should not make any formal approach to the Select Committee. Were you to do so, and the Members of the Committee chose to stand on their rights and choose Mr Preston regardless, you would have succeeded only in souring your relationship with them to no purpose. I suggest that you have another word with Humphrey Atkins to explain your concern in more detail. If, as I expect, he remains unwilling to seek to change the Committee's decision, then you will no doubt wish to consider very carefully whether particularly sensitive documents should be withheld: though given that Mr Preston has been cleared to SECRET level, I would hope that no very radical departure from previous practice will be necessary. In this connection, it may help you to know that Mr Preston's appointment as Special Adviser is for the duration of the Committee's current enquiry only; though, of course, there is no guarantee that it will not be extended.

A copy of this letter goes to Willie Whitelaw and John Wakeham.

JOHN BIFFEN

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State for Defence





MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALLING 01-218 6169

D/S of S/PS/22/8

10<sup>th</sup> February 1984

I feel that you should know of my concern at the appointment of Mr Antony Preston, the Naval Editor of "Jane's Defence Weekly", as a Special Adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence.

Mr Preston has worked closely with my Department in the past and indeed was once a member of it. He is regarded, I understand, as a competent and sensible journalist with a great deal of detailed technical knowledge and a wide network of contacts, both official and unofficial, in the defence field. He is, however, a working journalist, and there is clearly a conflict of interest between his role as journalist and his position as Special Adviser to the Defence Committee. He has, I understand been vetted by the Management and Personnel Office and so he is now permitted access to classified material up to SECRET level which my Department makes available to the Committee. The Committee, of course, has perfectly satisfactory arrangements for the safekeeping of classified material provided to them, and I am not doubting Mr Preston's personal reliability or indeed his good intentions. But I do<sup>not</sup> believe it is reasonable to expect

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP





Mr Preston to keep separate in his mind information acquired in his capacity as a Special Adviser from that acquired as a professional journalist. I feel that classified information could well be leaked. That will make my dealings with the Committee very difficult and my willingness to release classified information will naturally be affected by these considerations.

I am aware that there is at least one precedent for the Defence Committee appointing journalists as Advisers. Messrs Chapman Pincher and Simon Jenkins were engaged, I believe, on the Committee's inquiry into the handling of press and public information during the Falklands conflict: their particular professional experience was appropriate to that inquiry. But the circumstances of Mr Preston's appointment are very different. He is likely to be involved in several very sensitive inquiries which the Defence Committee are planning on the Trident programme, the physical security of military installations in this country, and the implications of ceasing, after 1985/86, our commitment to a 3% annual increase in defence expenditure. We must assume that information which we will be making available to the Committee in connection with these (and other) inquiries will be seen by Mr Preston. Otherwise, I see little object in his appointment as far as the Committee is concerned.

I fully support the Government's commitment to work as closely as possible with the Select Committees, and we are also doing all we reasonably can to help them in their work. I am also conscious of the Committee's sense of independence and their desire to exercise complete control over their own proceedings. But I have strong reservations about Mr Preston's appointment which I feel I must make plain to the Chairman of the Defence Committee in writing. I have already warned him orally of my disquiet.





I would very much welcome your support and any views you may have, together with those of other colleagues, before I set out my case to the Chairman of the Committee.

A copy of this letter goes to Willie Whitelaw and John Wakeham, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

for me  
A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Heseltine



- 7 MAR 1984

