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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

16 March 1984

The Prime Minister discussed with your Secretary of State, the Lord Privy Seal, Chief Whip and Sir Robert Armstrong yesterday morning the issues raised by the appointment of a working journalist, Mr. Antony Preston, as adviser to the Select Committee on Defence.

Your Secretary of State said that two issues concerned him. One was the protection of information given to the Select Committee in connection with their current enquiry into the lessons to be learned from experience of weapon systems used in the Falklands campaign; and the second was the difficulty of defending to other journalists the privileged access to information which Mr. Preston would enjoy by virtue of his position. The appointment of Mr. Chapman Pincher as adviser to the committee which had considered relations between the Government and press during a period of hostilities was not a precedent since that enquiry had been specifically concerned with press matters.

The Chief Whip said that it was likely that Mr. Preston's appointment would come to an end after the Select Committee's current enquiry. The Chairman of the Select Committee had also said that he would informally give the Government advance warning of future proposed appointments of advisers by the Select Committee.

The Lord Privy Seal said that it would be helpful to relations with the Select Committee if the current problem could be handled in a low key way. It would be difficult to establish a general proposition that particular categories of people were ineligible to be appointed as advisers. He suggested that it would be useful for him to discuss the general issue with the Chairman of the Liaison Committee.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that it would be useful for the Lord Privy Seal to discuss the general problem with the Chairman of the Liaison Committee. He should take the line that the Government was bound to take into account those advisers who would have access to material when deciding what material they could provide to select committees. In the present case, while Mr. Preston remained

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an adviser to the Defence Select Committee, the Secretary of State would be bound to avoid submitting material of higher sensitivity than that which he would normally be prepared to make available to a working journalist.

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

E. E. R. BUTLER

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