

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM SIR LEO PLIATZKY

PRIME MINISTER

Sir Leo's thoughts on public appointments procedure - not an immediate issue, but it may arise from reactions to his report.

Agree that we should resist pressure for any more formal or more public procedure?

MR PATTISON

*Yes*  
PUBLIC BODIES - APPOINTMENTS

*M.P. 2/1*

1. The report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies describes the arrangements for making appointments to these bodies, and suggests that more information should be given about salaries and expenses paid, but says that it would have been outside the practicable scope of this exercise to review the basic principle of filling posts solely through appointments by Ministers. I am sure that a different sort of exercise would have been needed in order to do justice to a political and constitutional issue of this kind.

2. We must reckon, however, with the possibility - though of course it may not materialise - that questions may be put, either at the Press briefings when the report is published, or to the Prime Minister in questions in the House at a later stage, about the Government's attitude on this matter, and especially on the idea, which has been canvassed recently in Parliamentary debate, of submitting proposed appointments to an appropriate Select Committee. It will of course be for the Civil Service Department to brief the Prime Minister if such questions are put to her, but they do not propose to initiate any response themselves to such ideas.

3. So far as the Press briefings are concerned, it will be best not to encourage expectations of further developments on this subject. I propose, therefore, if occasion should arise, to take the following line: "These are matters for the Prime Minister but, so far as I know, there are no plans for a change in existing procedures or for a special review of this subject."

4. It may just be worth briefly recording some comments of my own on the question of substance, since I did in fact discuss it with a number of people during the review as a matter of interest. From the Government's point of view, a crucial objective is to appoint the best possible people. The present arrangements may be a bit hit and miss - there is no substitute for actually knowing someone who is suitable and available, and often one does not know any such person - but neither I nor those to whom I talked had any clever ideas for doing better. Some people have expressed to me the hope that party politics can be left out of the choice of candidates so far as human nature allows, and some think that more use could be made of "headhunters" and advertisements; there is nothing in the present system to prevent that, or to

CONFIDENTIAL

*a Govt machinery  
May 77 - Public Appk.*



CONFIDENTIAL

prevent particular Ministers from casting their nets wider in any other way that occurs to them.

5. Giving a role in this matter to Select Committees might go down well with the school of thought which hankers after something like an executive role for backbenchers, but it would not help to get good people for public posts, and some of the best people would probably decline to submit themselves to this procedure. Therefore, if there were serious cause for concern about the patronage issue, it would be better to think in terms of a scrutiny procedure not involving the Select Committees. But I imagine that the Prime Minister will prefer to stick to her own policy of reducing the amount of patronage by holding down the number of public bodies.

6. I am sending copies of this to Mr Paul Channon's office and to Sir Ian Bancroft.

L.P.

LEO PLIATZKY

9 January 1980

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

cc Govt Machinery DSC  
May 79 - Public Appts.



File

bc: Mr. Peterson

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

SIR LEO PLIATZKY

The Prime Minister has seen your minute to me of 9 January about appointments to public bodies.

She is content with the line that you propose to take on this topic if it arises in your press briefings associated with the publication of your Report.

The Prime Minister is not attracted by the possibility of introducing Parliamentary Select Committees into public appointments procedure. As you suggest, her preference is to stick to a policy of reducing the scale of patronage by holding down the number of public bodies. For the present, she has no intention of making any further adjustment in public appointments procedure.

I am sending copies of this minute to Mr. Green (Minister of State's Office, CSD) and to Mr. Laughrin (Sir Ian Bancroft's Office, CSD).

M. A. PATTISON

KRB

14 January 1980

CONFIDENTIAL