



Prime Minister

Yes, but
Is it not possible
for an amendment or addendum
to be proposed suggesting
that this does
not have high priority
at present?

I was at last night's meeting and discussed
this matter for the Home Secretary
to send to you.

All were agreed but Mr St John
shows' speech this was to be a damage
which would be a damage
to the Government to take any action in House
of Lords reform.

PRIME MINISTER

HOUSE OF LORDS REFORM AND THE PARTY CONFERENCE

mt.

Agree x 1 and Y1 when? Feb 26/70

I held a meeting today, as we agreed last week I should in your absence abroad, to consider how the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster should reply to the motion urging the strengthening of the composition and powers of the House of Lords which will be the subject of the opening debate at the Party Conference next month (the text of the motion is attached). The Lord Chancellor, the Lord President, the Chairman of the Party, the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Paymaster General, the Chief Whip in the House of Commons and Ian Gow were present.

The wording of the motion is unfortunate because, as Christopher Soames in particular was at pains to point out at my meeting, if Norman St. John-Stevas accepts it in his reply, there is a real risk that it will be thought the Government is committing itself to make changes in the membership and powers of the House of Lords. We are then likely to be asked whether we propose to introduce legislation in this Parliament or the next. We were all agreed this morning that for a number of reasons we must avoid giving the impression that we are entering into any kind of commitment to take action on the House of Lords. In the first place, the Government has not yet considered the question of House of Lords reform in any real depth, much less made up its mind what its long term objectives and strategy are. And in any case, even if we wanted to move in the direction of changing the composition and powers of the Upper House, it is very doubtful whether we could get the necessary legislation through the present House of Commons. The same objections, it seemed to my meeting, apply to any attempt to entrench the House of Lords in its present form.

In view of these difficulties we considered whether we had to accept the motion at all. Peter Thorneycroft said that the Party

/was passionately

CONFIDENTIAL

X | was passionately in favour of keeping a Second Chamber. The motion selected for debate was only one of 25, and some others were much more toughly worded. We concluded that the strength of feeling in the Party was such that we had no alternative but to accept the motion.

Y | This means that Norman St. John-Stevas will have to make a very carefully balanced speech which, while going along with the motion, gives no hostages to fortune. He agreed this morning that he would steer clear - both in his speech and in any subsequent questions from the media - of saying anything which might suggest that the Government proposed to move on this subject either before or after the next General Election. To reinforce the absence of any commitment on the Government's part, he will rehearse some of the difficulties of reforming the House of Lords. We thought that, at the same time, he should attack the Labour Party's proposals for abolishing the Second Chamber, with all that that would mean if we had at some future date a House of Commons with a clear left wing majority, and defend the record of the present House of Lords, pointing out that it had been by no means ineffective, as we know to our cost. We also suggested that he might show that, contrary to popular belief, the House of Lords has been in recent years more of an obstacle to Conservative Governments than to Labour Administrations. !!

We agreed that it would be helpful if John Boyd-Carpenter were to speak in the debate, arguing the case for keeping the House of Lords in its present form. Michael Jopling will arrange this. We also agreed incidentally that Peter Thorneycroft should authorise the publication of a pamphlet on this subject which John Boyd-Carpenter, David Eccles and Niall Drumalbyn want to bring out.

We also discussed briefly Lord Alport's Bill about which he wrote to you on 11th September. We were all clear that whatever the merits of his proposals, a Private Member's Bill was not the right vehicle for introducing them. Quintin Hailsham and Christopher Soames will be letting you have advice on a reply to him.

/I should be

CONFIDENTIAL

I should be grateful to know whether you agree that Norman St. John-Stevas should handle the debate at the Party Conference in the way I have outlined above.

I am sending copies of this minute to all those who were at my meeting.

Wals

24 September, 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

In the light of the Socialist commitment to abolish the House of Lords and the likelihood that a future left wing government intent on perpetuating itself would establish a single chamber Parliament as a step towards the creation of a Marxist state, this Conference urges that the composition and powers of the Upper House should be strengthened and firmly established as a safeguard against arbitrary government.

CONFIDENTIAL

11 12 13
14 15 16
17 18 19
20 21 22
23 24 25
26 27 28
29 30 31
32 33 34

25 SEP 1980



From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Parliament
for
to wh.



HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

for
18/9

18 September 1980

Dear Chiv

This is to confirm that the meeting which the Prime Minister asked the Home Secretary to Chair, in her absence, to discuss handling of the Party Conference motion on House of Lords Reform, will be held here at 9.30 am next Wednesday, 24 September.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Lord Chancellor, Lord President, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Paymaster General, Chief Whip (Commons), Chief Whip (Lords), Lord Thorneycroft, and to David Wolfson (Political Office).

Yours sincerely
A P Jackson

(A P JACKSON)

C A Whitmore Esq

FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Denham 2



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

15th September, 1980

N.J. Sanders Esq.,
Private Secretary
(Parliamentary Affairs),
10 Downing Street,
SW1.

Prime Minister

MP 16/IX

ms.

Dear Nick,

REFORM OF HOUSE OF LORDS

The Lord Chancellor has received a copy of Lord Denham's letter of 4th August to Lord Thorneycroft on the proposal that the Conservative Party Conference should debate a resolution calling for the Reform of the House of Lords.

I understand that this is to be debated on the morning of Tuesday, 7th October. The Lord Chancellor would very much have liked to be able to attend the debate, but he will unfortunately be sitting judicially in the Appellate Committee. I am not sure whether this is in fact of any concern to you, but you may like to know that the Lord Chancellor will therefore not be able to be present.

Yours sincerely,
Michael Collon

M.H. COLLON

CONFIDENTIAL



Parliament

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

24 September 1980

Dear John,

HOUSE OF LORDS REFORM

I think that the most useful way of recording the outcome of the Home Secretary's meeting this morning on how to handle the debate on House of Lords Reform at the forthcoming Party Conference would be for Mr. Whitelaw to minute the Prime Minister reporting the conclusions of the discussion. I accordingly attach a draft.

Yours,

John Halliday.

John Halliday, Esq.,
Home Office.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

DRAFT

PRIME MINISTER

HOUSE OF LORDS REFORM AND THE PARTY CONFERENCE

I held a meeting today, as we agreed last week I should in your absence abroad, to consider how the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster should reply to the motion urging the strengthening of the composition and powers of the House of Lords which will be the subject of the opening debate at the Party Conference next month. (the text of the motion is attached). The Lord Chancellor, the Lord President, the Chairman of the Party, the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Paymaster General, the Chief Whip in the House of Commons and Ian Gow were present.

The wording of the motion is unfortunate because, as Christopher Soames in particular was at pains to point out at my meeting, if Norman St. John-Stevas accepts it in his reply, there is a real risk that it will be thought the Government is committing itself to make changes in the membership and powers of the House of Lords. We are then likely to be asked whether we propose to introduce legislation in this Parliament or the next. We were all agreed this morning that for a number of reasons we must avoid giving the impression that we are entering into any kind of commitment to take action on the House of Lords. In the first place, the Government has not yet considered the question of House of Lords reform in any real depth, much less made up its mind what its long term objectives and strategy are. And in any case, even if we wanted to move in the direction of changing the composition and powers of the Upper House, it is very doubtful whether we could get the necessary legislation through the present House of Commons. The same objections, it seemed to my meeting, apply to any attempt to entrench the House of Lords in its present form.

In view of these difficulties we considered whether we had to accept the motion at all. Peter Thorneycroft said that the Party was passionately in favour of keeping a Second Chamber. The motion

/selected for debate

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

selected for debate was only one of 25, and some others were much more toughly worded. We concluded that the strength of feeling in the Party was such that we had no alternative but to accept the motion.

This means that Norman St. John-Stevas will have to make a very carefully balanced speech which, while going along with the motion, gives no hostages to fortune. He agreed this morning that he would steer clear - both in his speech and in any subsequent questions from the media - of saying anything which might suggest that the Government proposed to move on this subject either before or after the next General Election. To reinforce the absence of any commitment on the Government's part, he will rehearse some of the difficulties of reforming the House of Lords. We thought that, at the same time, he should attack the Labour Party's proposals for abolishing the Second Chamber, with all that that would mean if we had at some future date a House of Commons with a clear left wing majority, and defend the record of the present House of Lords, pointing out that it had been by no means ineffective, as we know to our cost. We also suggested that he might show that, contrary to popular belief, the House of Lords has been in recent years more of an obstacle to Conservative Governments than to Labour Administrations.

We agreed that it would be helpful if John Boyd-Carpenter were to speak in the debate, arguing the case for keeping the House of Lords in its present form. Michael Jopling will arrange this. We also agreed incidentally that Peter Thorneycroft should authorise the publication of a pamphlet on this subject which John Boyd-Carpenter, David Eccles and Niall Drumalbyn want to bring out.

We also discussed briefly Lord Alport's Bill about which he wrote to you on 11 September. We were all clear that whatever the merits of his proposals, a Private Member's Bill was not the right vehicle for introducing them. Quintin Hailsham and Christopher Soames will be letting you have advice on a reply to him.

/I should be

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

I should be grateful to know whether you agree that Norman St. John-Stevas should handle the debate at the Party Conference in the way I have outlined above.

I am sending copies of this minute to all those who were at my meeting.

24 September 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

H. R.
2

TEXT OF MOTION ON HOUSE OF LORDS REFORM

"In the light of the Socialist commitment to abolish the House of Lords and the likelihood that a future left wing government intent on perpetuating itself would establish a single chamber Parliament as a step towards the creation of a Marxist state, this Conference urges that the composition and powers of the Upper House should be strengthened and firmly established as a safeguard against arbitrary government."