

Copy to Mr Hughes.

Dyer



- 1. Mr Whitmore ^{MW 14V}
- 2. Prime Minister

Content for had
Sources to answer
as he proposes?

FROM THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE
HOUSE OF LORDS

Yes mb

MAD
147V

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Alport has the following oral Question down in the Lords next Tuesday, 19th May:

"To ask H.M.G. whether, in view of the Lord President of the Council's undertaking on 8th December, 1980 that they would 'give urgent consideration to the strategic purpose' of the Constitutional Referendum Bill, now before this House, any statement of past progress and future intentions can now be made".

It falls to me to reply for the Government and I seek your agreement to answer along the following lines:

"Yes, my Lords. Since the debate in your Lordships' House last December, the Government have carefully considered the matter to which my noble friend refers. They have decided not to come forward with their own proposals to afford some form of statutory protection to the House of Lords. The Government will, however, in the course of the present Parliament, consider the many different proposals which have been put forward for reform of the composition and powers of your Lordships' House".

I think it right and timely that I should answer Lord Alport directly on the results of our deliberation on his own proposal, and also to couple this with an announcement of our intention to review powers and composition in the life-time of the present Parliament, without, of course, making any commitment to bring forward firm proposals.

There are likely to be a number of supplementary questions. If pressed on why the Government have decided not to protect the existence of the Lords, I would simply say that the Government considered the advantages and disadvantages of following this course. They took careful note in particular of the contrasting views expressed in the debate in their Lordships' House. On balance they agreed that the disadvantages outweighed the advantages and have considered it inappropriate to consider this one aspect of the Second Chamber without reference to the broader question of powers and composition.



FROM THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE
HOUSE OF LORDS

I would not propose to react substantively if the danger of abolition is raised.

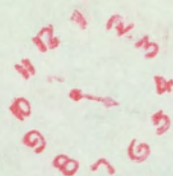
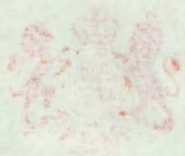
I am copying this minute to the Home Secretary, and to the other members of the Sub-Committee of the Home and Social Affairs Committee which considered the question of protection earlier this year.

S.

SOAMES
14 May 1981

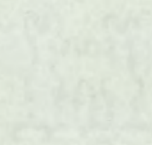
CONQUEROR
LONDON

14 MAY 1964



FROM THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

CONQUEROR



LONDON

B.B.

Postscript

PM: RDA version,
with amended
final sentence.

PRIME MINISTER

You were content with Lord Soames' proposed answer in the Lords tomorrow on House of Lords reform (Flag A). Robert Armstrong has, however, now suggested an alternative draft to Lord Soames, stressing the Government's commitment to a second Chamber, but leaving the timing of any change more vague. I believe that Lord Soames is likely to accept this version (below). Do you have any preference?

MAJ

18 May, 1981.

Replied by phone

na

MAJ 207v

"Yes, my Lords. Since the debate in your Lordships' House last December the Government have carefully considered the matter to which my Noble Friend refers. The Government is entirely committed to a Second Chamber as an essential part of the Constitution. They have, however, decided not to come forward at this time with proposals to afford some form of statutory protection to the House of Lords without reference to the broader issues of the composition and powers of your Lordships' House. The Government continues to keep these issues under review."

under review."

CONFIDENTIAL

Partisan

MAP ✓

Ref. A04928

18th May, 1981

I have seen a copy of your minute of 14th May to the Prime Minister, proposing a draft Answer to Lord Alport's Oral Question tomorrow about House of Lords reform.

Before they saw it my people here had prepared a draft Answer, and I thought that I should let you see it, even at this late date. It is not in substance different from your draft, but you will see that it contains a reaffirmation of the Government's commitment to a Second Chamber, and uses a wording which would imply that the Government would not envisage proposals for statutory protection except in the context of some review (if not reform) of composition and powers of the House of Lords (and implicitly, therefore, that the Government would envisage statutory protection in such a context).

I offer you this formula à toutes fins utiles, as they say in France.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Soames, CH, GCMG, GCVO, CBE

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