

Parliament



From the  
Minister of State

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Rt Hon Francis Pym MC MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

✓ MP

13<sup>4</sup> July 1981

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GOVERNMENT REPLY TO SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CONCORDE

Your Private Secretary wrote to mine on 3 July to pass on your reactions to the suggestions in my letter of 22 June as to how we should handle the Government's reply. We have taken note of the procedures that you have agreed with Edward du Cann; and the answer to be given to the arranged Questions on 14 July will reflect your advice on this point.

As regards a possible debate, you will have noticed that, in supplementaries to Jock Bruce-Gardyne's Question on 22 June, he suggested that one should be held before the Summer Recess. This was to be expected. More to the point was the intervention by Stanley Orme, as Shadow Industry Minister, who referred to public interest in this matter, said that it was not sufficient to produce a Command Paper, and that there must be a debate at the earliest possible opportunity.

It is difficult to know how to interpret this initiative. Concorde has not been a Party matter since 1973-74 when, at a time of considerable uncertainty as to the future of the project, Michael Heseltine was given some fairly rough treatment by the Opposition. In the period 1974-79 the then Government, having decided to continue the project, were solidly in favour of supporting Concorde. There have been no subsequent public indications of a change of heart by the Opposition as a whole. But, for what it is worth, the Labour members of the Select Committee, Ian Mikardo in particular, were no less reproachful towards the project and the Government's role in support of it than were their Conservative colleagues.

However that may be, you seem likely to be pressed pretty heavily after Questions on Thursday 16 July - and not just by the Committee members, who have given notice of their intentions in the last paragraph of their report to pursue the matter on the floor of the House - to allow time for an early debate on the Committee's report and the Government's reply.





I suggested in my letter of 22 June to colleagues that we had no particular reasons for wanting a debate, and certainly none for proposing that one takes place in Government time. That is still my position; and the fact that, at this point in the Session, there are so many opportunities for having the matter debated in non-Government time, including the use by the Opposition of a Supply Day or half day, will add to your ability to refuse a debate in Government time, should timetable considerations require this.

But equally we have no need or desire to avoid a debate. If, therefore, you were to decide that one could be conceded without creating too much of a precedent, in terms of Parliamentary time, for discussion of all the other Select Committee reports which are now issuing in fairly large numbers, you would find us ready.

A further consideration to be taken into account when considering giving time for a debate in the House of Commons, is that the House of Lords, in anticipation of the Committee's report and the Government's reply, have already debated Concorde extensively on an unstarred Question by Lord Glenarthur on 11 February, and less fully on an oral Question by Lord Balfour of Inchrye on 30 April. It seems very likely that those Peers (apparently the great majority) who support Concorde will use the Lords' procedures and less pressing timetable to make their views known before the Recess.

I certainly agree with the suggestion which Michael Jopling made in his note of 30 June, that everything possible should be done to keep the Conservative Aviation Committee officers as firmly on side as possible. To this end I am planning to see Cranley Onslow and others from the Aviation and Industry Committees (though Maxwell Hyslop is a lost cause)  
*Today* Monday 13 July.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of mine of 22 June.

NORMAN TEBBIT

14 JUL 1981





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*Parliament*



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 1AA

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

3 July 1981

*Dear Peter*

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GOVERNMENT REPLY TO SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CONCORDE

Your Minister wrote to the Secretary of State for Industry on 22 June about the Government's reply to the report made by the Select Committee on Industry and Trade on Concorde. A copy of this letter was sent to the Chancellor of the Duchy.

The Chancellor of the Duchy asks me to say that he is generally content with the proposed handling of the reply. In particular, he agrees that no commitment should be given to a debate until it is possible to assess the reaction of the House to the Government's reply, and the extent of any pressure for such a debate.

... His only comment is that, as you will see from the attached letter, an undertaking has been given to Mr Du Cann, as Chairman of the Liaison Committee of Select Committee chairmen, that the role of arranged written answers in relation to select committee reports will be confined to drawing the attention of the House to replies which have been made to the committee in other forms. It would accordingly be contrary to this assurance for any arranged written reply to do more than call attention to the publication of the Command Paper.

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries of the recipients of your Minister's letter.

*Yours ever*  
*N P M Huxtable*

N P M HUXTABLE  
Private Secretary

P E Mason, Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Minister of State for Industry  
123 Victoria Street

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