I want to start by reminding you how the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs came into being. It was a delayed, although not a difficult birth. There are now fourteen departmental select committees, but originally only thirteen were unveiled. When in June of last year, Norman St. John Stevas came to the House with his proposals, a Scottish Select Committee was a notable absentee from the list. The reason was that the Government, rather strangely, had decided to hold the Scottish Select Committee in reserve. I don't think there was any serious suggestion that there would not ultimately be such a body, but the idea was to hold it back as a plum to be drawn out at a strategic moment from the all-party talks on devolution - a consolation prize for those who stubbornly believed with Lord Home that a Tory could vote 'No' in the referendum without really meaning it. The Government wasn't smoked out of that position until October: we all knew it was coming but we didn't have a Scottish Select Committee.

This leads me to make an obvious point, but one which must be constantly stressed. The Select Committee is not a form of devolution. I take devolution essentially to mean the creation of a body which has legislative powers and whose composition reflects the electoral pattern in Scotland. We do not legislate in the Scottish Select Committee and the Committee reflects the composition of the House.

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* This paper was originally given in March 1980 at a seminar organised by the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh. The seminar was supported by grants from Edinburgh's Social Science Faculty Seminars Committee and from SCOPE at Heriot-Watt University. The paper was rewritten in light of further experience in July 1980.
of Commons. These points perhaps should be self-evident but they are not self-evident to many people in Scotland nor are they always remembered by the Scottish press.

It may be that the Select Committee will be indirectly involved in and no doubt will be affected by the argument about how government in Scotland should change. If you have read the modest clutch of papers the Government produced as a basis for the inter-party consultation, you will have noticed that the paper on the composition and functions of the Scottish Grand Committee comments that "in the consideration of such possible developments it will be relevant to note the establishment of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which has the responsibility for examining the Scottish Office and the power to sit in Scotland". The existence of the Committee may marginally influence the argument and some individual members will doubtless be more heavily involved. That does not mean we are to be seen as a poor man's assembly. Our task is to scrutinise and monitor the activities of the Scottish Office in Scotland. It is an important role but a limited one.

The other preliminary point I would like to make is that any Select Committee must be realistic about its place within the structure of British politics. In Britain we do not have the separation of powers which the American Constitution builds into the Washington system. It may be that our view of the American Constitution is sometimes over-simplified. Perhaps the separation of power is not complete, but it is real enough in one specific sense. A Democratic senator may help his political career by savaging the administration of the day even if it is headed by a Democratic President. If someone does a good job as Chairman or as a senior member of a Senate investigating committee, then even if electors are encouraged by this to vote against his party's Presidential hopeful, they may still say, "We think he's a damned good Senator and we will support him". Now in Glasgow Garscadden you may think that I'm the best thing since sliced bread but if you want Mrs. Thatcher you'll vote against me; on the other hand, even if you think I'm a drunken layabout who only goes to London under duress once every three years, if you want a Labour government, you'll vote for me however reluctantly.

It would be quite wrong to suggest that there is no advantage for a British politician in doing an effective job as a select committee member. If however the field of investigation touches the government's record there is a built-in disincentive for those with the same party label as the administration. That doesn't mean there is no role for select committees but it is a practical limitation upon their activities. There are certain key political controversies on which no agreement is likely to be reached. There is a tendency to avoid these, though this is not always the case: no one could accuse the Employment Committee of playing safe when it decided to investigate the legal immunities of trades unions, or the Environment Committee when it plunged into council house sales. There is the question of a bi-partisan approach. In 1979, the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries took just such a look at the steel industry but members of the Committee got into dreadful hot water as a result. I suspect that those who were members of the Committee on the government side and signed the report found it a distinctly uncomfortable experience leading to a good deal of pressure from the Whips. In the event a government motion to 'take note' of the report rather than positively approve it was passed by the House with the support of all Labour members of the Committee. Allegiance to party and ministers carried the day which was perhaps predictable in the context of a minority government. More recently the new Home Affairs Select Committee has issued a report recommending the abolition of the SUSlaw. In the vote on the floor of the House which followed, the Committee with the exception of one original dissenter stuck to their guns despite government advice. The position was of course very different – principles are perhaps an allowable luxury when there is a good working majority. I believe there will continue to be considerable problems in working out relationships between members of different parties and between the Committees and the government of the day.

If you look at Parliament over the last ten years you will discover that back-benchers are now showing signs of independence the like of which have not been seen for a long time. In the 1970-4 Parliament two out of every three back-benchers at some point voted
against an official whip. As the present government is already finding, the ground troops are prepared to take an individual stand even if it means bucking the system. The lives of whips over the next few years are probably going to become much more difficult and from a select committee point of view, that may be a useful development.

The stakes for the Scottish Select Committee are particularly high. The fluctuating fortunes of the SNP and the referendum debate and its aftermath have created greater expectations of the Scottish Select Committee than of some others. This is a mixed blessing. It is significant, though I don't want to make too much of it, that I am still conscious of being a minority chairman. This tells you something about the political sensitivity of the Scottish committee. I suspect I am more conscious of being in a minority position than other Labour chairmen although six of my colleagues are in exactly the same situation. In the early days at least occasional statements appeared in the press from the "majority group leader" on the Committee. I think that I'm the only select committee chairman who has had to cope with a "majority group leader" from within the Committee. I say that not to make a hostile point because it illustrates the significance which at the time was attached to the formation of the Committee. There were further difficulties over honouring the all-party agreement about the Chairmanship which have now been largely left behind. The Committee itself was seen as a considerable prize. So the question of which party should nominate the Chairman was a real test for the "usual channels". Although at the time this was to say the least worrying, I think, in retrospect, that it indicated that Members who were to be involved in the Committee were prepared to take it seriously.

We have special difficulties in Scotland because of the party balance in Parliament. There are 44 Labour MPs representing Scottish seats, 22 Conservatives (of whom 9 are Ministers) 3 Liberals and 2 SNP. The balance within Parliament as a whole is very different. I would pay tribute here to my Conservative colleagues on the Committee. It is by any standard, a highly time-consuming commitment. These MPs have also to support the Conservatives' heavy Scottish legislative programme by manning the Standing Committees which consider new legislation. Almost everyone on the Conservative side of the Scottish Select Committee has served on the committee for the Tenant's Rights (Scotland) Bill or the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, or both. One sometimes had the impression that these committees were meeting 26 hours a day, but I suppose that can't have been true, because Members did report for Select Committee meetings as well. The crowded programme must have made for substantial difficulties.

It also means that the Scottish Select Committee is inexperienced in parliamentary terms. I served on the original Committee back in 1969 when it was first set up and so did one other Member, but we are the only two with that experience. Five of the seven Members on the Conservative side entered Parliament for the first time in May 1979 and a sixth had only six months experience of the short Parliament of 1974. The Committee shows every sign of being hard-working but it is inexperienced. This reflects the composition of the Conservative group in Scotland and is unavoidable. Whether it is a good or bad thing is debatable. Experience in the parliamentary game can often be an advantage but it does not always encourage a fresh and flexible approach.

In one sense the Committee has broken new ground. In Parliament important developments can sometimes happen by accident. Progress is made if not by the back-doors, at least by a side-entrance. On this occasion the Scottish group of Labour MPs decided to hold an election for the Select Committee. I don't know what would have happened if anyone had gone along to the Whips and asked "Can we hold an election for the Scottish Select Committee?" I think he would have been told that the very idea was heretical. But the Whips didn't notice, or if they did notice, they didn't get round to doing anything about it, and the election took place. There were nineteen candidates for six places. The nineteen candidates reflected a remarkable level of interest by people of varied seniority within the party. If I may say so, the result might be taken as an advertisement for the electoral system. We ended up with an extraordinarily well-balanced contingent. Some are recently elected, others fairly long in the tooth; some are Tribune Group, some Manifesto Group; some, and this is difficult in the Scottish Labour group, represent agricultural constituencies,
(or to be precise one sits for an agricultural constituency, but that represents almost one hundred percent success); and some are from the East coast, others from the West. An election as distinct from the mysterious workings of the usual channels has set quite an important precedent. It will be interesting to see in future parliaments whether members of other select committees, particularly on the Labour side, are chosen in the same way.

Coming now to a more general point, why do we have these select committees at all? Why are they accepted as part of the system? I think they reflect a change in our attitudes to the machinery of politics. This is evident in all sorts of ways. Electing members of a select committee is just one example of a general trend. There has been a determined effort to democratise parliamentary procedure and to find a role for the backbencher. Again, I talk about my own party because I know it. There is, for example, a suggestion from within the Parliamentary Labour Party that all Cabinet Ministers should be elected in any future Labour government, rather than be appointed through Prime Ministerial patronage. There is the call for the mandatory reselection of MPs by their Constituency parties before each election. In other words, there is a call for greater accountability by office holders. At the same time backbenchers are demanding a bigger role. Many MPs are going to remain on the backbenches and office depends not just on ability but on the luck of being in the right place at the right time and above all on your party winning elections. The select committees may help—and the word 'may' should be firmly underlined—to give depth and purpose to backbench activity.

Having talked about the formation of the Committee let me sum up. There will be interest in the Scottish Committee, but constraints there will be and these will make it difficult for it to be an innovating Committee. There may be innovation in the procedural sense, but the political sensitivity in the Scottish Committee perhaps makes other broader initiatives more difficult. We have had all sorts of issues which in other committees might not be thought to be sensitive, but which become sensitive in the Scottish context. I can give you a simple example: where should the Committee meet? There is an obvious place if we are in Scotland, and we all agree that we will be fairly frequently in Scotland. But are you making a political point if you don't go there? Or, more dangerous still, are you making a political point if you do go there? The theological niceties of that argument would be worthy of any academic seminar. In the end, the Committee decided that we should go to the Royal High School when it is convenient and sensible to do so which is perhaps no bad formula.

In fact the Committee was the first body to handel the renovated Royal High School building and has been back since to take evidence from the Secretary of State on the government's public expenditure plans. It is easy to be cynical about Parliament on circuit or on safari, but there is a strong case for a Select Committee getting out and about round Scotland. Apart from Edinburgh there have been meetings in Glasgow, Inverness, and Aberdeen as well as a good number of informal discussions sessions in other parts of the country. It is no bad thing for the individual MP to be jerked out of the repetitive pattern of the weekly shuttle between Constituency and Westminster. There is positive merit in bringing a Glasgow member into the very different atmosphere of Edinburgh or the North East, and, no doubt, the opposite is equally true.

The Scottish Committee in comparison with others is in a special position. Some fear that the system may lead to a cozy grouping of specialists within each committee ending in cahoots, if I may put it like that, with the responsible minister and the civil servants, and so become part of a closed and comfortable world in which independent judgement is at a discount. We can't do that in Scotland because we won't be specialist in the narrow sense. This is the problem of being a Scottish MP mirrored in another way. Scots are expected to be omnibus across the board on Scottish affairs. The danger is that true expertise becomes impossible and that what the Scottish system demands is a plausible familiarity with each and everything. It is very difficult to get off this treadmill. On the Scottish Select Committee, because we shall be looking at Scottish education, Scottish industry, to some extent the Scottish economy, Scottish housing and half a dozen other major areas of interest we shall not be a specialist committee in the normally accepted sense of the word. We may spend a lot of time looking at the health service or the criminal
law or unemployment. That's not going to happen to any other select committee except presumably to a limited extent to the Welsh.

There is even doubt about our remit. We are obviously monitoring the Scottish Office, but are we looking at Scottish Affairs or the Scottish Office? Mr St John Stevas dealing with the Scottish Committee in the debate on 1st October 1979, made it clear that the Committee could call for "evidence from London-based departments on the exercise of their responsibilities in Scotland". That is a significant phrase which will be prayed in aid at some future date although the Scottish Office and its particular responsibilities must be the Committee's principal interest.

It is a daunting prospect and there is a steady stream of mail from groups and individuals suggesting subjects of investigation. The difficulty is that the Committee is limited in scope. We do not even have power to appoint a sub-committee. At present only three of the committees have such a power. It is recognised that the Scottish Committee has particular problems and I hope that it will be possible to persuade the House to pass the necessary resolution but so far the authorities have resisted the move, presumably on the grounds that the other committees would follow and the impact on the budget and availability of staff would be significant. This factor cannot be totally dismissed. I have seen as many as 18 Select Committees meeting on one parliamentary day and the demands on the civil service who are often involved in the preparation of papers as well as the giving of evidence could be considerable. By July 1980 the expenses incurred by Select Committees in the current financial year excluding printing costs were £414,500 and any increase arising from sub-committees would not be welcomed by a government so obsessed by public spending figures. The marginal increase in cost would be tiny, compared with the advantage of increased flexibility of operation. Even with two enquiries in tandem vast areas of the Scottish Office must inevitably escape examination. From the point of view of members it would give opportunities to get involved in questions which must be very much restricted by the size of the undivided committee. We have 13 members while all the others are limited to 9 or 11. It makes a surprising difference to an individual member's chance of getting into the action.

One factor which has helped the Committee is the press coverage it has received. I hope that we continue to earn the goodwill of the press and that our experience will differ from that of the first Scottish Select Committee. It met in a blaze of television cameras at the Scottish Land Court and then hardly impinged on public consciousness at all. I don't want to over sell the product at this early stage, but it is essential that the Committee is able to sustain public interest in the longer term and to do this the Committee needs the press. If you don't legislate, if you depend upon persuasion, then you cannot be persuasive unless people know what you are saying. Members of the general public and no doubt many MPs, will not have the energy or inclination to wade through the evidence in full. So that if the point is to get across, it must be reported. It's also important because if Members are to put in the kind of effort that is necessary, they must get mileage out of it. It's no use a backbencher busting his guts in the Select Committee, if no-one knows he is doing it or there is only limited coverage. He may be finding it intellectually satisfying, but it is not helping him as a politician. It is essential that the Committee is seen to be relevant, seen to be producing useful information, and is reported. So far the new system has done well in the sense that select committees have made news. Some of the coverage has been for subjects with 'glamour' such as the 'SUS' law and deaths in police custody, but there has also been a great deal of comment on, for example, Sir Geoffrey Howe's evidence to the Treasury Committee on the Government's economic forecasts. Under the old system there was a tendency for a small cadre of Members to be seen as select committee specialists. There were people of ability, without doubt conscientious, but with a public image which was faint. Eventually, members started getting the message that it was not a good thing to be on a select committee because you just disappeared; you were excluded from all sorts of much more useful activities in which a parliamentarian could be involved. (To a limited extent this is still true. In the Parliamentary Labour Party this session, anyone serving on a select committee was debarred from becoming a candidate for the Western European Union). If there is one
thing which is necessary for the success of select committees it is to change that perspective within Parliament. It must be changed by establishing the fact that it is politically useful to be on a committee and, put simply, there is something to be gained from it. This may sound cynical, but the same principle would apply in other professions.

The Select Committee has started with a fairly major enquiry into machinery for attracting investment to Scotland. The subject was chosen because employment, or the lack of it, has become a matter of vital concern to Scotland and because both academic specialists and the popular press have expressed with increasing frequency the view that Scotland has been taken to the cleaners by the Irish and by other competitors in the search for footloose firms, often from North America, looking for a European manufacturing base. We felt that there was prima facie cause for this concern and preliminary soundings suggested that this was a topic which might produce interesting and worthwhile results. If the Committee can follow the clues and hints in the evidence it should be possible to produce a comprehensive, readable and constructive report, inviting not just government comment, but where necessary, government action.

What is essential is a short sharp exercise with an end result produced within a reasonably short compass. I was on the first Scottish Select Committee in 1969 which decided to investigate the Scottish economy. Formally, the subject was economic planning in Scotland, but in reality the whole Scottish economy was under scrutiny. What happened was that the Committee set off bravely into the jungle and after two years muffled sounds could still be heard in the middle distance as the Committee hacked its way through the undergrowth. Occasional groans of pain emerged and only the cognoscenti remembered their existence. They just got lost. It was very unfair because their report was a monumental work of real value to those who took the trouble to read it. The second Scottish Committee set up early in the 1970 Parliament dealt with land use in Scotland. I talked to those involved. Again the difficulty was the structure of the enquiry. While one sub-committee was looking at a revolutionary wide-ranging concept which would have created an agency with the powers of a new town authority but without its geographical limitations, the other was ruminating on the development and use of Highland peat deposits. The contrast was too pointed. The danger of losing direction in this way is there for all to see, for the 1970 Committee was not reappointed and we had to wait for the best part of 10 years for a successor. This may have reflected broader political judgements, but it also underlined a lack of momentum which I believe partly resulted from the unwieldy topic chosen for investigation.

There are signs that the lesson has been learnt and the new select committees are trying to develop more flexible lines of enquiry. We are trying to get away from the block-buster set piece lasting over many months. This needs a little bit of tactful selling because if we do "a one off" enquiry it may be open to misinterpretation and seen as something it is not and was never meant to be. Interested parties look for considered judgements from a one-day hearing not realising that the end product is the evidence itself and the information which can then be used in the continuing argument about the issue in question.

The evidence taken by the Scottish Committee on the impact of the BBC expenditure cuts North of the Border falls into this category. The Director-General Ian Trethowan and all the Scottish hierarchy appeared. I believe that in one morning session we got on record in a clear and concise form much valuable information not otherwise available about the stage of the cut backs, the horse-trading which went on and the way in which the victims within BBC Scotland were selected. The Committee produced no report but it made a significant contribution to an important debate. I learnt a great deal from the session and perhaps the questioning did something to get behind the professionally bland press releases which usually mark unpleasant decisions of this kind.

Our very first enquiry-into the White Fish Authority - was another example of a 'quickie' though it had important aspects which went beyond the simple gathering of information. For one thing we were learning as we went along. It is not easy if there are thirteen members on a committee with one witness, only two hours to fill and with everyone wanting their pound of fish, flesh or good red herring. We
are learning all the time how to structure the committee and how to make it more effective. This first meeting in Aberdeen was, I think, a good example of how a pressure group can be tested by the select committee procedure. It is very easy to appear at a committee session without thinking through the special problems likely to be met in this kind of investigation and without having fully worked out the basic ground of your objections. It was clear that interests within the industry didn't want to pay an increased levy to the White Fish Authority. What was not so clear was whether this was because the industry was so hard up that it could not pay or because the services provided by the White Fish Authority were seen to be so bad that even if the industry could pay it wouldn't want to do so. I hope both sides learnt from the experience. We were also able to produce a report which I think was coherent and helpful.

It was read by all the people on the Statutory Instruments Committee who subsequently considered the White Fish Authority levy. Alec Buchanan-Smith did more than pay tactful lip service to the findings, for positive action on the lines recommended, followed and followed fast. The result was a reduction of 50% in the announced levy increase and legislation to bring within the levy scheme transhipped catches particularly of mackerel which had been slipping through the net with sad consequences for the authority's finances. It is hardly the stuff of revolution and it would be silly to claim that the Select Committee report was alone responsible for the government change of heart. For all that the report was implemented and some credence must be given to the Minister of State's assurance to the Committee that government would be prepared to look again at the problem once the report was available. Above all we aired the issue. We gave the industry the feeling that they had had their say. It was not just a matter of a better informed debate on the Statutory Instruments Committee. The Hearing itself had acted as a catalyst for change.

Even so brief an investigation had been valuable preparation for the legislative process.

As someone whose parliamentary existence this session has been much tracked by the committee stage of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, I did on occasions suffer from the delusion that the only printed book in the world was the Thomson Report on Criminal Procedure. Its record was creditable - published in 1975 the legislation came along in 1980 - compared with many other similar reports. I think that there may be possibilities of using Select Committees as alternatives to Royal Commissions or Departmental Committees of Inquiry. At least if conclusions were reached they might be implemented a little more speedily than those of the average Royal Commission.

Sometimes a simple hearing may encourage a government department, a minister or a public body to explain their policy or justify their record. There is also a case for a customary round of meetings in the Select Committee year. I see no reason why the Secretary of State for Scotland shouldn't expect to be summoned twice a year before the Committee to account for his stewardship in the previous six months. Or why the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency should not, in the month after the publication of his Annual Report, expect to spend a session in a Scottish Select Committee explaining what had gone right and wrong. After their last Annual Report for example it might well have been a lively session and the frank views of the present chairman suggest such a session would not be dull. I think there must be value in this for if we are talking about checks on the executive, if we are talking about testing what government is doing, the traditional mechanisms of Parliament are totally inadequate.

I am told that Question Time provides the legislature's traditional check on the power of the executive. What I know is that I am taking part in a noisy ritual that can on occasion turn into something approaching a bear garden. The best that can happen is that a couple of good party points survive and are picked up by the press. But that is not the traditional role of Question Time and it is futile to pretend it is. Perhaps only intermittently, and certainly in a limited area of policy, I believe that a Select Committee session with the Secretary of State could be a more effective way of mounting sustained sane and effective questioning of the ministerial remit than can possibly be managed under the present system. Even with an extended question time moved to the Scottish Grand Committee as has been proposed in connection with the all-party talks, there would be a place for the Select Committee exercise. I hope this is an area in
which the Select Committee will slowly establish a useful role.

The aim is to give the public access to information which at present is inaccessible. I hope we will be able to throw a little light into dark places. The test is whether public interest is sustained and proposals made by the Select Committee are implemented or at least influence policy. Structurally, I am sure there are advantages and opportunities. I have been in Parliament for 62 years, and it is only now through the Select Committee that I am coming face to face with senior Scottish civil servants. Their names I knew and I was aware of their influence, but direct contact was rare for the back-bencher. It is no bad thing to be able to put a face to the name and experience may do something to remove prejudice on both sides. This interaction is essential if the system is to develop. There is always a tendency for civil servants to fight their corner and protect their minister against the threat that a determined Select Committee presents. We have already seen official guidance to civil servants which will reinforce natural caution. The witness who says little minimises the danger of giving hostages to fortune. The decision-making process and the advice tendered to the Minister should in the government's view remain a closely guarded mystery. The civil servants will have to get used to the strains and stresses of the new system if some formal evidence sessions are to be more than a skilled exercise in non-communication.

It may be that the framework in which a select committee works will itself adapt. My own view is that there should be less stress on formal "on the record" evidence. Once the members have settled on a subject the current position should be defined and laid out in the traditional formal hearing, but what should follow is a good deal of informal discussion on a non-attributable basis with interested parties and a lot more time spent thinking within the Committee. Once Members have formed tentative conclusions, then the public sessions can be reconvened to bounce the ideas off the civil servants and ministers who may one day have to live with the results. I do not want to sound gloomy about present developments. Our own look at inward investment into Scotland, whatever the final outcome has, I believe, forced a good deal of movement in the system. There have been a number of "pre-emptive" strikes by pressure groups within the civil service, designed to direct the Committee from solutions which were seen as oversimplified, or crudely radical. The Committee has been "used" by those seeking change and I do not object to that. If the result is to force an active re-examination of traditional attitudes that in itself would be an achievement.

Another possible development is in the field of pre-legislative scrutiny, although it is by no means clear that this will be the responsibility of the select committees. The Procedure Committee felt that this would be too great a burden and suggested that the standing committee formed to consider a bill should have the power to operate virtually as a select committee before starting its traditional clause-by-clause, line-by-line examination. Thus the Committee looking at the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill could have taken evidence from the Law Society of Scotland, the Scottish Council of Civil Liberties or any other interested body on police powers or the reintroduction of judicial examination before plunging into the thicket of proposed amendments and debate which ultimately occupied some 1,600 columns of Hansard.

I have some doubts. A standing committee is almost unashamedly partisan. There are government and opposition benches. The select committee process grafted on is an attempt at an impartial assessment of evidence offered from outside the committee. It is an unlikely combination of roles with I suspect the brutal political battle winning every time. In any event if scrutiny of this kind is to have any value, it must take place at a point in the process when ministers are not committed to every dot and comma of the proposed bill. It must come at a time when a change of mind is not equated with loss of face and seen as a legislative U-turn. The standing committee will take evidence after the second reading and that is simply too late. The witnesses may provide useful ammunition for the committee battle, but at that late stage it is difficult to see major changes in the bill. I strongly favour pre-legislative examination but it must come if not in the planning stage, at least while a Bill is still firmly in draft form. It may well be that select committees will yet emerge as the most efficient available option.
There are possible problems in the growth of the new committees. If we win and if we make the select committees attractive then other parts of the parliamentary process will suffer. Some have doubts about select committees because they fear they will be a success. At the moment if you go into the House of Commons there may practically be no one there because everyone, the critics argue, is on a select committee or standing committee or battling with pressure groups or in the gym, tearoom or library - I can see the point. If you see the Chamber as the centre, as the powerhouse of the parliamentary process then the more successful the select committees are, the more they undermine the Chamber. Select committees, by and large, don't clash with standing committees which tend to meet in the morning but they do clash with attendance in the House. If you take a romantic view about the central place of the Chamber of the House of Commons as distinct from the institution of Parliament then there are clearly dangers in this. As it happens do have a romantic view of the importance of Westminster and the parliamentary process but this is based on Parliament wherever and in whatever form it sits. My loyalty is not exclusively to the Chamber itself and in that sense I take a broader view of the role of an MP. I recognise the force of the argument, but I can't share the fears.

I regard the Scottish Select Committee as very exciting. For me personally it will be a lot of work, but I believe that it is worthwhile. I noticed one Scottish journalist referred to the committee as a cuckoo in parliament's nest and went on to talk about ill-digested and ill-prepared reports by inconspicuous backbenchers gathering dust on shelves. I hope it is not going to be like that. I think our role will become increasingly important although I find the suggestion that we are going to change history overnight plain embarrassing. One well-known Scottish reporter told me that being Chairman of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs was more valuable than being a Scottish Minister any day. Now even in my wildest dreams I am not going to subscribe to that point of view.

Rumour reaches me that when the Welsh Committee met for the first time in Cardiff Castle, there was an announcement that it signalled the end of mandarin government in the Principality. I don't believe