PRECEDENT BOOK.

Part III.
CABINET COMMITTEES.
PART III - CABINET COMMITTEES

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The Cabinet Committee System

Cabinet Committees fulfil two functions:

(a) The mass of business engaging the collective responsibility of the Government is too great to be handled by a single body. Cabinet Committees relieve the burden falling on the Cabinet in two ways. First, they dispose finally of a great number of problems of minor importance, acting in the Cabinet's name by virtue of powers delegated to them by the Cabinet. Secondly, on problems which are of such importance that they must in any event come to the Cabinet, a Committee can shorten discussion in Cabinet by preliminary examination which focuses the issues and narrows down the points outstanding for the Cabinet's decision. This often enables the Chairman of a Committee to put to the Cabinet in a single memorandum issues which would otherwise come before them in separate papers submitted by several Ministers.

(b) The system of Cabinet Committees enables Ministers of Cabinet rank who are not members of the Cabinet to take their share in the formulation of Government policy. By their membership of these Committees, they can assist in disposing of business devolved by the Cabinet to the Committees, and can also join in the preliminary stages of formulating policy proposals for submission to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Committee system not only relieves the pressure on the Cabinet itself but also lightens the collective work of Ministers generally. None of the Cabinet Committees is as large as the Cabinet itself. Some of the more important Committees may consist of ten Ministers, as compared with 17 members of the Cabinet. Other Committees are substantially smaller.

On the appointment of Cabinet Committees in the period before December, 1916, see notes in File 4/1/56.

On the War Council, the Dardanelles Committee and the War Committee in the First World War, see Gibbs, War Cabinet Narrative.

On the Committee of Imperial Defence (which has been described as a Prime Minister's Committee as distinct from a Cabinet Committee), see lectures by Sir M. Hankey (1927) and General Ismay (1939) (Copies in Part VII (5) - Annex V) and Gibbs, War Cabinet Narrative.

On Cabinet Committees in the period up to 1939 see Jennings, pp. 198-202; Anson, Vol. II(1) p. 136; Gibbs, War Cabinet Narrative; note of June, 1936 in Part VII(5) - Annex V (Home Affairs Committee); Note of April, 1936 in Part VII(4) (Economic Advisory Council, etc.)
On the War Cabinet Committee organisation, see Gibbs, War Cabinet Narrative. For brief statements see notes in Part VII(5) - Annex V.

For an analysis of current Cabinet Committee arrangements see G.C.C.(49) 10 (copy in Part VII(5) - Annex V)

For a note on current Cabinet Committees including details of Committees whose existence has been disclosed see Part VII(5) - Annex III.
Cabinet Committees are of two kinds — Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees. The ad hoc Committees are set up by the Cabinet or by the Prime Minister to handle questions of transient importance, often to work out the details of a policy which the Cabinet has approved in principle, or to find means of surmounting difficulties which have been raised in a Cabinet discussion but need not detain the Cabinet as a whole. On this account they are usually smaller than the Standing Committees of the Cabinet. They normally meet two or three times and then submit a report to the Cabinet. They may, however, remain in being for several months if they have been appointed to handle problems which, though temporary, may give rise to difficulties over a period.

The Standing Committees of the Cabinet are arranged on a more schematic basis. They are designed to provide a regular means of handling, below the Cabinet level, problems engaging the collective responsibility of Ministers which arise regularly throughout the year. Whenever there is a reasonable bulk of homogeneous questions which can with advantage be discussed below the level of the Cabinet itself, it is the practice to establish a Standing Committee to deal with them. The growth of the Cabinet Committee system is, however, very largely an empirical growth — Committees are established when experience has shown the need for them and abolished when they are no longer required. There is no conscious intention to impose a logical system which would provide an appropriate Committee for every problem which might conceivably arise. Many proposals are in fact submitted to the Cabinet direct, especially if they are of such importance that they must be considered by the Cabinet itself but not of such complexity that they must first be "pre-digested" by a Committee.

The Coalition Government's Machinery of Government Committee gave much study to the lines on which a permanent Cabinet Committee organisation should be developed. See M.G. (43) 2 (Second Revise) (Copy in Part VII(5) - Annex V).

See also references noted in para. 1 above.
Responsibility of the Secretary of the Cabinet

4. The Secretary of the Cabinet has a special responsibility for advising the Prime Minister on all questions connected with the appointment and organisation of Cabinet Committees, for making suggestions on the composition of new Committees and for maintaining a constant watch over the working of the system generally.

Ministry of Defence Committees

5. The Committees working under the Minister of Defence and served by a secretariat in the Ministry of Defence are, strictly speaking, not Cabinet Committees. Such of these Committees as consist of Ministers (e.g., the Defence Production Committee, the Standing Committee of Service Ministers) are, however, comparable to Cabinet Committees and their procedure and organisation are similar.

The Committees which worked under the Minister of Reconstruction in 1943–44 were in a somewhat similar position.
Cabinet Committees are appointed by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Cabinet, from whom, directly or indirectly, their authority is derived. The origin of a Cabinet Committee frequently lies in a decision of the Cabinet: if the Cabinet find difficulty in reaching a decision on some difficult problem it is sometimes found convenient to appoint a Committee to go over the ground in detail and to make recommendations. Again, the Prime Minister may decide (on a submission from the Secretary of the Cabinet or otherwise) that a Committee should be set up to take general charge, under the direction of the Cabinet, of development of policy in a particular field.

The appointment of a new Committee is notified to all concerned by the issue of a memorandum setting out:

(a) The authority for the appointment (this may be a reference to a Cabinet Conclusion, a decision by the Prime Minister or, in the case of Sub-Committees, a Committee's minutes.)

(b) The terms of reference of the Committee.

(c) The names of the Chairman and Members.

(d) The names of the Secretary or Secretaries.

(e) Any necessary remarks about the method of work of the Committee or its relations with other Committees.

In the case of Ministerial Committees, and the more important Official Committees, this memorandum is prepared and signed by the Secretary of the Cabinet and, after approval by the Prime Minister, is circulated as a Cabinet paper. In the case of Sub-Committees, it is prepared by the Secretary of the parent Committee in consultation with the Secretary of the Cabinet, and circulated as a paper of the parent Committee. In either case it is also circulated as the first paper of the new Committee. If the Committee or Sub-Committee is appointed ad hoc for a strictly limited purpose, and is likely to complete its task in a very short time, the first stage of circulation in the Cabinet or parent Committee series is dispensed with, and the notification is circulated only as the first paper of the new Committee.

For procedure on the start of a new series of documents see Part IV.
The purpose of a Committee, and the scope of its work and authority, are expressed in its Terms of Reference. Committees, whether Standing or ad hoc Committees, may be empowered by their Terms of Reference to decide questions on their own authority, or be limited to making recommendations to the Cabinet or another Committee; in any case the Cabinet may at any time call for a report from a Committee and any Minister may appeal to the Cabinet against a Committee's decision.

Prior to the Second World War, the minutes of the Home Policy Committee were regularly submitted to the Cabinet for confirmation.
Chairmen of Ministerial Committees are appointed directly by the Prime Minister; chairmen of Official Committees are appointed by his authority, which may be given in less important cases by the Secretary of the Cabinet on his behalf. The Prime Minister himself is usually chairman of the most important Cabinet Committees; and he is entitled to take the chair of any Cabinet Committee at any time without altering its constitution. The chairs of several important Committees are held by Ministers with co-ordinating functions, e.g. the Lord President of the Council and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is normally desirable to avoid a situation where the Chairman of a Ministerial Committee is junior to one or more of the members. The Prime Minister may himself decide the chairmanship of Ministerial Committees, but it is open to the Secretary of the Cabinet to make suggestions to him (after such consultation as may be desirable). Unless the circumstances (e.g. previous discussions in Cabinet) make this unnecessary, the Prime Minister normally himself asks the Minister concerned to accept the Chairmanship, either by minute or personally. In less important cases the Secretary of the Cabinet may do this on his behalf.

Although senior, the Minister of Defence sits under the Home Secretary's Chairmanship at meetings of the Ministerial Committee on Civil Defence. See File 7/2/114.

On occasion it has happened that a Minister who while in office had been Chairman of a Committee of Imperial Defence Sub-Committee continued to be Chairman after he left office. Thus Lord Haldane continued as Chairman after he left office. Thus Lord Haldane continued as Chairman of a Committee on Anti-Aircraft Research (A.R.O. 1st - 14th Meeting, May, 1925 - March, 1928); and Lord Cecil as Chairman of a number of other Sub-Committees. Both attended the meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence at which the reports of their Sub-Committees were considered. See Part VII(1)(B).

The chairmanship of Official Committees is usually settled by the Secretary of the Cabinet in consultation with the heads of the Departments mainly concerned with the subject matter of the Committee. This consultation may occasionally be carried out by letter, but usually takes place in inter-Departmental discussion when the scope and functions of the Committee to be set up are settled. In important cases the Prime Minister is informed of the proposed chairman in the submission by the Secretary of the Cabinet seeking his approval generally to the setting up of the Committee. To avoid delay the chairman's name is sometimes alone given in the main paper announcing the appointment of the Committee, the membership for that purpose being expressed as consisting of representatives of specified Departments.

It is sometimes found convenient to arrange for a Junior Minister to take the chair at meetings of Official Committees. Examples are the Middle East (Official) Committee before its reconstitution in April, 1949 (File 7/2/30); the Materials Committee (File 7/2/46); the South-East Asia (Food Supplies) Committee before its reconstitution in 1946 (File 7/2/50); the Africa Committee, (File 7/4/28).
11. Deputy chairmen are nominated only in special circumstances. If the Chairman is unavoidably absent from a meeting, the Chair is taken by the senior Minister present.

The Minister of Defence is Deputy Chairman of the Defence Committee. See Cmd. 6923. Deputy Chairmen have also been appointed for certain Official Committees.

When the membership of certain Cabinet Committees was being revised after the reconstruction of Mr. Attlee's Administration in March, 1950, it was represented that the Lord Chancellor's special position on the Legislation Committee, where he sat on the right of the Lord President (the Chairman), entitled him to higher precedence on the Front Page of the minutes than he would have received if the order given in the list of Ministers was strictly adhered to. It was therefore suggested to the Prime Minister, with the agreement of the Lord President, that the Lord Chancellor should be formally appointed Deputy Chairman, and the Prime Minister agreed to this.
According to their membership, Committees are either Ministerial, i.e., composed entirely or mainly of Ministers, or Official, composed entirely or mainly of officials. Sometimes Official Committees, and more rarely Ministerial Committees, have members from outside Government service altogether; usually, however, when such persons attend meetings of Cabinet Committees they do so to give evidence or advice and not as members.

A recent example of a mixed Committee is the Food Distribution Committee appointed in May, 1948 under the chairmanship of the Economic Secretary, Treasury. Its membership consisted of Junior Ministers and officials. See File 7/2/103.

From time to time Opposition representatives and others were invited to attend meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence and in some cases they were members of its Sub-Committee. In 1913 Lord Balfour and Lord Esher were members of a Standing Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on overseas attack on the United Kingdom. In 1914-15 Lord Balfour was a member of the War Council. In 1935-37 Mr. Churchill was a member of the Sub-Committee on Air Defence Research (A.R.D., 4th-12th Meetings). See note in Part VII(1)(B) and File 27/10/18.

On 11th May, 1931 the Prime Minister (Mr. MacDonald) stated in reply to a question in the House of Commons: "In accordance with a precedent followed on several previous occasions His Majesty's Government have invited the other parties to be represented on the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence which is engaged on the consideration of problems connected with the forthcoming Disarmament Conference. The ultimate responsibility for the policy decided on will, of course, rest with His Majesty's Government". (Hansard, Col. 380).

In the appointment of a Ministerial Committee it is customary for the Secretary of the Cabinet, on the Prime Minister's behalf, to send minutes to the Ministers concerned, informing them of the Prime Minister's decision to appoint the Committee and of his wish that they should serve upon it. These minutes are as a rule couched in terms which do not call for a reply, but it is usual to allow a short interval after their despatch before a note is circulated formally setting up the Committee. In certain circumstances (e.g., where it is clear to all concerned that a particular Minister must obviously be a member of the new Committee) these minutes are dispensed with. In other circumstances they may be sent by the Prime Minister himself, particularly if the Minister is being asked to serve not so much in a Departmental as in a personal capacity.

For examples of minutes sent personally by the Prime Minister, see File 7/2/73. (Fuel Committee; minute to the Lord President, who had been absent through illness when the Committee was set up).

In March, 1948, the Prime Minister sent personal letters in manuscript to the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Health inviting them to become members of the Economic Policy Committee. See File 7/2/82.
The factors to be borne in mind in considering the membership of a new Ministerial Committee cannot be precisely defined. Obviously those Ministers whose Departments are primarily concerned with the subject matter will normally be members of the Committee. In determining the remaining membership, personal and political factors are important; it is important also to see that individual Ministers are not excessively burdened with Committee work.

In May, 1948, when it was proposed that Mr. Dalton, who had then just been appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, should be a member of the Defence Committee, the Minister of Defence (who had not been consulted by the Prime Minister) held that as the membership of the Committee was laid down in Cmd. 6923 a change in membership, if acceptable on other grounds, would need to be communicated to Parliament. This view was contested, but the Prime Minister decided in any event to withdraw the authority he had previously given for Mr. Dalton's appointment. See File 7/2/3.

The membership of Official Committees is usually settled by the Secretary of the Cabinet in consultation with the heads of the Departments concerned. The normal method is for the Secretary of the Cabinet to write to them outlining the functions of the Committee and asking them to nominate representatives. This is sometimes done after the circulation of the paper announcing the setting up of the Committee.
Secretaries of all Cabinet Committees, whether Ministerial or Official, are appointed by the Secretary of the Cabinet; they are normally members of the Cabinet Office or the Office of the Lord President of the Council; where, however, a particular Department is closely concerned with the work of a Committee, a Joint or Assistant Secretary from that Department may be appointed by agreement between the Head of the Department and the Secretary of the Cabinet. Occasionally, Official Committees are served only by Departmental Secretaries; this is, however, exceptional, and often leads to doubt as to the status of the Committee as a Cabinet Committee.

The Secretary is the servant of the Committee as a whole, but particularly of the Chairman, to whom he looks for instructions on any questions which may arise and under whose authority he acts on matters on which he has not been given precise instructions by the Committee itself. On general questions of the practice and procedure of Cabinet Committees, however, he is responsible to the Secretary of the Cabinet, through his superior officer in the Cabinet Office, if he has one.

In addition to his work in direct connection with meetings, the Secretary of a Committee is responsible for doing all he can to assist the Committee in fulfilling its function, by (a) drawing the attention of the Chairman to events or information which affect the Committee's work, (b) watching the action taken by Departments to implement the Committee's conclusions, particularly where the Committee has called for a return or report, and (c) preparing, as part of the permanent record of the Committee's activities, an index of the matters dealt with and decisions taken.

Normally the member of the Cabinet Office who is to act as Secretary of a new Committee is informed at the time when the memorandum announcing the appointment of the Committee is under preparation in the Private Office. Arrangements are normally made at the same time for the nomination of a Committee Clerk to assist the Secretary with clerical work for the Committee. Notes of guidance for Committee Secretaries are circulated by the Secretary of the Cabinet from time to time.

Occasionally the Cabinet Office is asked to provide a Secretary to make a record of ad hoc meetings of Ministers held at 10, Downing Street. They have also in the past provided the Secretariat for various Committees of enquiry which are not strictly Cabinet Committees, e.g. the Committee of Enquiry into the procedure for ordering Civil Aircraft (1944); Committee on Intermediaries (1949). Other similar Committees are the Committee on Basic English (1946) and the Committee on the Regent's Park Terraces (1946-7).
19A. Cabinet Committees normally meet in Conference Rooms in the Cabinet Office, except that meetings of which the Prime Minister is Chairman normally meet at No. 10, Downing Street. The business of the House sometimes demands that meetings should be held in the House; on these occasions the Prime Minister's room or the room of another Minister is normally used.

After the General Election of February, 1950, Mr. Attlee's Labour Government were returned to power with a very small majority in the House of Commons. Mr. Attlee therefore gave instructions that Ministers must regard regular and continuous attendance at the House of Commons as their urgent duty and that meetings of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees must be held at the House during the hours when the House was sitting. The Minister of Works, on his own initiative, arranged for a Committee Room to be made available for the use of Ministers and it was suggested that this might be used for meetings of Cabinet Committees of which the Prime Minister was not Chairman (the Prime Minister's own room being used when he was in the Chair). The suggestion was rejected, on the ground that the Committee corridor is in that part of the Palace of Westminster on which by tradition Government business does not encroach and that Private Members could not be prevented from looking into the room during meetings, e.g. in search of a colleague. The Foreign Secretary agreed that his room in the House (the biggest, apart from the Prime Minister's) might normally be used for meetings of Committees of which the Prime Minister was not Chairman.
BUSINESS AND PROCEDURE

General

The procedure of Cabinet Committees approximates to that of the Cabinet. Matters for discussion are normally raised by members only after giving notice, either by the submission of a memorandum or, if they wish to raise a matter orally, by notifying the Secretary, so that the Chairman and other members may be informed. The decision as to what may and what may not be discussed lies with the Chairman, and on this it is the duty of the Secretary to advise him so far as he can. At meetings the procedure is informal, the discussion being controlled by the Chairman but not subject to any rules of debate. Cabinet Committees do not vote or pass resolutions; their Conclusions are the general sense of the meeting, as it emerges from the discussion, and as it is frequently summed up by the Chairman at the end of the meeting. The Secretary is particularly responsible for the recording of the conclusions and is entitled to ask what they are if he is not sure. Otherwise he does not speak at meetings, except to answer questions addressed to him about the carrying out of his duties.

The current notes on procedure state:-

While Committee meetings provide at times a useful forum for the discussion of policy and for enabling Ministers to ensure that their points of view are understood and to make a contribution to the formulation of policy, their prime object is the despatch of business and the making of decisions. Inter-departmental questions should be settled as far as possible between officials, or failing that between Ministers, of the Departments directly concerned. They should not be allowed to drag on. Where colleagues have to be consulted, but only two or three are directly concerned, agreement can often be reached by correspondence or by personal meetings; much time can be saved by personal contact. Failing agreement recourse can be had to the Prime Minister, Lord President or Chancellor of the Exchequer. This will often make it unnecessary to take the matter to a Committee.

Particular points which the Prime Minister wishes the Chairmen of Committees to keep in mind are:

(a) Care should be taken to prevent papers coming forward for discussion which could be settled otherwise; and Secretaries of Committees should be encouraged to submit suggestions for reducing the amount of business to be transmitted at full meetings.

(b) Attendance should be restricted to the permanent Members and other Ministers who have a major interest in the question under discussion. Ministers should not be required to sit through lengthy discussions in case points affecting their Departments should be raised; nor should they insist on attending meetings for the purpose of making Departmental points which have no important bearing on the main issues under discussion. Arrangements should be made for the attendance of one of the Law Officers at meetings at which legal issues are likely to arise.
(c) Discussion should be kept to the point; irrelevance or repetition should be checked.

(d) Conclusions should not be framed in a way which will require further discussion by Ministers, if that is not necessary. Once a policy decision has been taken, responsibility for its detailed working out and the supervision of its execution can usually be left to the Ministers departmentally concerned.

(e) The dilatory process of referring a question from one Committee to another should be avoided as far as possible.

(f) Much time is lost in the aggregate if meetings do not begin punctually at the appointed hour.

(C.P. (49) 95, paragraphs 27-28).

For an earlier statement of the points included in paragraphs 27 and 28 of C.P. (49) 95, see C.P. (46) 357 and C.P. (47) 258.

22. The standing rules regarding prior discussion with the Treasury on proposals involving expenditure or affecting general financial or economic policy apply equally to submissions to Ministerial Committees as to the Cabinet, as likewise the rule which requires that proposals involving additional staff must be accompanied by an estimate of the additional man-power likely to be needed. See C.P. (49) 95, paragraph 4.
Attendance

23. Subject to the concurrence of the Chairman, any Minister has a right to attend meetings of a Ministerial Committee of which he is not a member for the discussion of matters for which he is responsible. Similarly any Department has a right to be represented at meetings of Official Committees. If a Minister who is a member of a Committee or who has been invited for a particular item is unable for any reason to attend it is usual for him to be represented by his Parliamentary Secretary. (It is exceptional for a Minister to be represented by an official.) The regular representation of a Minister by his Parliamentary Secretary is, however, to be avoided as derogating from the importance of the Committee; and steps are taken from time to time to remind defaulters of their responsibilities.

24. Where Ministers must unavoidably be absent from meetings it is customary for the chairman to be informed in advance, either by the Minister himself (by letter, or minute, or through his Private Secretary) or by the Secretary of the Committee. In the case of Committees of which the Prime Minister is himself chairman his approval must be obtained to the attendance of a representative. This is usually done by minute, from the Secretary of the Committee, or, if time does not allow, orally through the Private Secretaries.

If a Minister is himself unable to be present it is sometimes unnecessary for him to be represented unless his Department is substantially concerned in the business to be taken. In these circumstances the Minister may put his view in writing to the Chairman or through some other member of the Committee. Particular isolated points are sometimes communicated to the Secretary, who takes steps to inform the Chairman.

25. While the attendance of officials at meetings of the Cabinet is very rare, their attendance at meetings of Ministerial Committees is more frequent but nevertheless exceptional, certainly at the more important Committees, including those of which the Prime Minister is chairman. The attitude of chairmen to the attendance of officials varies, but save in exceptional circumstances, it should be discouraged. If an official is to attend, the Chairman should be informed in advance, and in the case of Committees over which the Prime Minister presides his specific approval must be obtained. Officials attending Ministerial meetings do not normally speak; they may, however, in rare cases, be asked to explain some point in discussion at the request of the Chairman or of their own Minister. Any such statements are not normally attributed to them personally in the minutes of the meeting.

26. Representatives of Departments attending meetings of Official Committees are normally held to be expressing not their personal views but the official views of their Departments. In special circumstances (e.g. when there has been insufficient time for prior consultation) they may state that the views expressed are personal and may reserve their Department's position.

27. It is a standing instruction to Secretaries of Committees that they should take steps to see that Government spokesmen in the House of Lords are invited to meetings of Cabinet Committees when matters of particular concern to them are
to be discussed, e.g. draft Bills for which they will be
responsible in the House of Lords. See note by the
Secretary of the Cabinet of 13th December, 1947 (recirculated

In February, 1946 consideration was given
to the circulation of a note stressing the
importance of the personal attendance of
Ministers who were members of Cabinet Committees.
The proposal was, however, not pursued, and
instead action was taken through the Private
Secretaries of particular Ministers. Similar
action has since been taken from time to time
particularly in respect of attendance at
meetings of the Lord President’s Committee.
See File 4/1/31.

Since the Secretary of State for Scotland
has frequently to be in Scotland on Fridays it
was arranged in 1947 that where necessary, he
might be represented by one of the Joint
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State at
meetings of the Lord President’s Committee and
the Production Committee. See paragraph 3 of
a note by the Secretary of the Cabinet dated
16th October, 1947 on the times of meetings of
the main standing committees of the Cabinet.
(File 48 Pt. 2).

A similar dispensation has been given to
the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who may from
time to time be represented by the Financial
Secretary or the Economic Secretary.

In present circumstances it is very rare for persons who
are not Ministers of the Crown or Crown Servants to attend
meetings of Ministerial Committees. On rare occasions such
persons have been present at meetings of Official Committees.

In the past such attendance at meetings
of the Committee of Imperial Defence and its
Sub-Committee was not unknown. On 28th May, 1908
Lord Balfour, then Leader of the Opposition,
attended to give evidence before the Sub-Committee
of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the
question of overseas attack on the United Kingdom.
(For this purpose he had been sent a copy of
the Sub-Committee’s draft report and of earlier
papers.) On 10th March, 1915, Mr. Bonar Law
(Leader of the Opposition) and Lord Lansdowne
attended a meeting of the War Council. In
1930, Mr. Baldwin and Mr. J. Lloyd George were
invited to a meeting of the Committee of
Imperial Defence to discuss the question of a
Channel tunnel. In 1931, prior to the
Disarmament Conference, several Opposition
leaders were called into conference by the
Committee of Imperial Defence, including
Sir Austen Chamberlain, Sir Samuel Hoare,
Sir Thomas Inskip, Mr. Lloyd George, Sir
Herbert Samuel, Mr. Eden, Lord Cecil and
Lord Lothian. There is no record of
Opposition leaders attending after 1931. See
also above, MEMBERSHIPS—File 7/2/13.
For attendance at meetings of the Emergency Business Committee see note of 1st January, 1949 on File 27/4/12.

It has never been the practice, since the foundation of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1904, to pay fees for anyone not a Government servant for attendance at any Cabinet Committee meeting. Reimbursement of travelling expenses and the payment of subsistence allowances was, however, provided for in the case of the Advisory Committee on Atomic Energy (File 7/3/14), and the Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services (File 7/4/29). Certain of the members of the Advisory Panel for the Official Military Histories of the War receive honoraria (File 71/1).
Adjustments in the Cabinet Committee system are often occasioned by particular developments of policy. The system as a whole is, however, kept under general review by the Secretary of the Cabinet on behalf of the Prime Minister. Far-reaching adjustments are often made as a consequence of Ministerial changes. (Minor modifications are sometimes made, with the Prime Minister's approval, when a fresh edition of the Committee Organisation Book is in preparation.) Broadly the system at any given time reflects on the one hand the preoccupations in the field of policy and on the other the personal requirements and qualities of individual Ministers.

From the nature of the case there is no prescribed procedure to be followed. Normally when any general review of Cabinet Committees is contemplated the initiative is taken by the Prime Minister in discussing his tentative proposals with his senior colleagues. The Secretary of the Cabinet may also be given an opportunity of commenting at a fairly early stage. Sometimes discussion proceeds on the basis of a draft memorandum (to be circulated ultimately to the Cabinet by the Prime Minister) prepared by the Secretary of the Cabinet on the Prime Minister's instructions. When agreement has been reached the Prime Minister circulates a general memorandum on the scope of the new Committees and on their inter-relation; detailed notes on the composition and terms of reference are circulated by the Secretary of the Cabinet in the separate Committee series.

At the end of 1945 a special review of Cabinet Committees and of the Committee work of Ministers was carried out. See File 7/2/3A.

This review led to the issue of a directive by the Prime Minister (C.P. (45)306) on the presentation of business to the Cabinet and its Committees and of a memorandum by the Prime Minister (C.P. (45)333) on the Standing Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet.

A substantial change in the Cabinet Committee structure was carried out by the Prime Minister on the reconstruction of the Government in the autumn of 1947. See C.P. (47)280 and File 7/2/3 Pt. 6.
APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES ON CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

One of the first steps after the formation of a new Cabinet is the appointment of new Cabinet Committees, including a King's Speech Committee. Normally the main standing committees (e.g., the Lord President's Committee and the Legislation Committee) are reappointed; it is the practice for the Secretary of the Cabinet to draw attention to the desirability of reappointing these Committees, most of which have been appointed by successive administrations in one form or another. Sometimes different titles are used, but it may be noted that the Legislation Committee has retained the one series of symbols (H.P.C.) on reappointment by succeeding Cabinets.

For the procedure followed when the "Caretaker" Government succeeded the Coalition Government in May, 1945, see File 7/2/3 Pt. 3.

For the appointment of Committees when the present Labour Government took office see File 7/2/3 Pt. 4.

For the practice in the numbering of documents on the reappointment of standing committees see Part IV.

For the appointment of the King's Speech Committee after a change of Government see notes of August, 1949 on File 27/6A.
While the collective responsibility of Ministers often requires discussion between Ministers on some important question which falls wholly or mainly within the purview of a single Department, the normal course is for the resulting decision to be announced and defended by the Minister concerned as his own decision.

There may be rare occasions when it is desirable to emphasise the importance of some decision by stating specifically that it is the decision of His Majesty's Government. This, however, should be the exception rather than the rule. The growth of any general practice whereby decisions of the Cabinet were announced as such would lead to embarrassment. Thus, some decisions of Government would be regarded as less authoritative than others. It is contrary to accepted practice for Government decisions to be announced in terms which disclose or imply that they have been reached by a particular Committee of the Cabinet. Critics of the decision reached by a particular Ministerial Committee would press for its review by some other Committee or by the Cabinet, while the constitutional right of individual Ministers to speak in the name of the Government as a whole would be impaired.

The underlying principle is, of course, that the method adopted by Ministers for discussion among themselves of questions of policy is essentially a domestic matter, and is no concern of Parliament or the public. The doctrine of collective responsibility of Ministers depends, in practice, upon the existence of opportunities for free and frank discussions between them, and such discussion is hampered if the processes by which it is carried on are laid bare.

For these reasons it is also the general peacetime practice to avoid disclosure of particulars of the composition and terms of reference of Cabinet Committees, other than of one or two long-established Standing Committees.

(C.P. (49) 95, paragraphs 29-32.)

For earlier statements see C.P. (45) 100 and C.P. (46) 199.
Disclosure of the existence of Cabinet Committees

For the reasons given in paragraphs 30-31 of C.P. (49) 95, it is the custom to refuse to give, even to Parliament, any information about the existence, terms of reference or composition of Cabinet Committees. On 28th February, 1949, the Cabinet were reminded of this rule (C.M. 16 (49) 1).

In exceptional circumstances details have been given publicly, particularly in time of war, and general statements have on occasion been made about the Cabinet Committee structure. The main reason for such disclosures is that the Government sometimes finds it necessary, in response to public and parliamentary pressure, to show that it has some organisation for dealing with particular problems. The disadvantages of disclosing the existence of Cabinet Committees are - (i) it tends to weaken the responsibility of Departmental Ministers; and (ii) it makes it difficult subsequently to adjust the Committee machinery or the composition of particular committees.

See generally File 4/1/21.

Of Ministerial Committees now in existence the following have been mentioned in official statements, i.e. in Parliamentary papers or in official Press announcements:


Ministerial Committee on Civil Defence: in the debate on the Second Reading of the Civil Defence Bill the Home Secretary made a number of general references to the existence of the Committee. See Hansard, House of Commons, 30th November, (Col. 1827).

Economic Policy Committee: in the statement issued from 10, Downing Street when Sir Stafford Cripps was appointed Minister for Economic Affairs in 1947 it was announced that there would be "a new Ministerial Committee on Economic planning whose scope will cover the major issues of both internal and external economic policy". It was further stated that the Prime Minister would himself preside over this Committee for the time being. ("The Times", 30th September, 1947; File 4/1/3). (This statement did not in fact use the title "Economic Policy Committee"). Details were given, without authority, by Mr. Francis Williams (who was Advisor on Public Relations to the Prime Minister from 1945 to 1947) in his book "The Triple Challenge" published in 1948.

Production Committee: in the statement issued when Sir Stafford Cripps was appointed Minister of Economic Affairs in 1947 it was announced that he would preside over a Committee of Ministers concerned with the day-to-day handling of production questions. See File 4/1/3 (Part 3) (Details were given by Mr. Francis Williams, without authority, in 1948: see above).
Lord President's Committee: no specific statement has been made during the life-time of the present Government, but it is generally known that there is a Lord President's Committee - one of the main standing committees of the Cabinet and the successor to the Home Affairs Committee of previous administrations. For war-time references see below.

Legislation Committee: its functions were outlined in Sir John Anderson's Romanes Lecture in 1946. While there has been no specific official statement during the life-time of the present Government, this Committee, like the Lord President's Committee, is known as one of the main standing Committees to which reference has frequently been made in official statements in the past. For war-time references see below. (The work of the Committee, and also of the Future Legislation Committee, is outlined in the (confidential) Treasury booklet on the Preparation of Legislation).

The Civil Aviation Committee has frequently been mentioned in (unauthorised) Press references, which have also indicated that the Lord Privy Seal is Chairman. See File 4/1/21.

During the Second World War general statements were made in Parliament from time to time about the adjustment of the Committee system to meet changing needs. The most important of these statements are:

Initial War Cabinet Committee Organisation: Hansard, House of Commons, 1st February, 1940, cols. 1262-4 - statement by the Prime Minister (Mr. Chamberlain).

Re-organisation after appointment of Coalition Government: Hansard, House of Commons, 4th June, 1940, cols. 769-771 - statement by the Lord Privy Seal (Mr. Attlee).

Further developments: Hansard, House of Commons, 21st January, 1941, cols. 81-150, 261 et seq.

Chiefs of Staff, etc. White paper on "Organisation for Joint Planning" (Cmd.6351, 1942) Hansard, House of Commons, Vol. 378, cols. 40-42; Vol. 379, cols. 796; and Vol. 380, cols. 61-67. (Further details have since been given in Mr. Churchill's "Second World War").
Official Committees

The arguments which justify the withholding of information about Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet do not have the same force in respect of Official Committees, and in certain circumstances it may be expedient not to withhold information about the existence of these Committees. At the same time it does not follow that such information should be freely given. The arguments against such disclosure (save in special circumstances) are that the inter-departmental machinery is not readily understood outside Whitehall, and that there is a risk that disclosure (e.g. to Parliament) would lead to ill-informed discussions on the means of improvement. Again, it is desirable to avoid giving an impression of a large and incoherent mass of Committees. Lastly the Official Committees form part of the Cabinet Committee structure and are often closely related to Ministerial Committees. Nevertheless it may in certain circumstances be desirable not to withhold information about the existence of Official Committees. Their composition should, however, not be disclosed: the refusal to provide such information can be based on the principle of the anonymity of the Civil Service.

See File 4/1/21. The question has been raised particularly in relation to the Select Committee on Estimates of the House of Commons, and to Parliamentary Questions (see below).
Parliamentary Questions

34. Keske May (14th Edition, page 337, paragraph (8)) lists as inadmissible questions which seek information about the decisions or proceedings of the Cabinet, Committee of Imperial Defence, etc. Nevertheless such questions are occasionally passed by the Clerk at the Table. The answer normally takes the form: "It would be against the public interest to give the information which the hon. Member seeks," or "The arrangements made by the Cabinet for the discharge of the business for which it is collectively responsible are matters for the Cabinet itself and are not customarily disclosed." Sometimes it may be desirable to try to have the question withdrawn.

See File 4/1/21.

For examples of refusal to give information in reply to questions, see Hansard, House of Commons, 21st January, 1937, Col. 354 (a supplementary question about Cabinet discussion arising from the business statement);

Hansard, House of Commons, 12th November, 1945 Col. 1748 (Information refused about the composition of the Man-Power Committee);

Hansard, House of Commons, 10th December, 1947, Col. 1006 (information refused about meetings of the Defence Committee and attendance of the Minister of Transport);

Hansard, House of Commons, 4th March, 1948, Col. 526 (information given about the functions of the (Official) Economic Information Committee, but its composition not disclosed - "It would be contrary to practice to disclose the names of the officials who serve on this Committee").
COMMITTEE ORGANISATION BOOK

Details of the composition, terms of reference and authority of the main standing committees of the Cabinet and their sub-committees are given in the current Committee Organisation Book, copies of which are held by all Departments, and also by certain Commonwealth representatives. The book is normally revised completely at yearly intervals; notes of amendments are also circulated at roughly monthly intervals. The current book includes in a separate part committees working under the Minister of Defence. The current edition omits a number of Committees of an ad hoc character; a few are also omitted on grounds of particular secrecy. Subordinate committees of officials are in the most part excluded.

See File 7/2/3/1.

The first consolidated list of committees was issued in September, 1939 (W.P. (G) (39) 17). The first War Cabinet Committee Book was issued in November 1939 (W.P. (G) (39) 93). A complete revise was circulated in March, 1941, and second and third revised in July, 1942 and November 1944. The first issue of the Committee Book under Mr. Attlee's administration was in January, 1946; revises were circulated in March, 1947, March 1948 and May, 1949. Since March, 1947 the Committee Book has been in two parts, the first dealing with Cabinet Committees, and the second with Ministry of Defence Committees.

A detailed list of economic committees, including subordinate committees and working parties was prepared in May, 1949.
36. The Cabinet Office are not concerned with committees which do not form part of the Cabinet Committee structure except where their work impinges on that of Cabinet Committees. Thus the (Ministerial) Emergencies Committee may receive reports from an inter-departmental committee of Officials under Home Office chairmanship and served by a Home Office secretary (the Emergencies (Official) Committee), and the Cabinet Office Secretary of the Emergencies Committee keeps in close touch with the committee of Officials. On occasion an inter-departmental committee has been brought into the Cabinet Committee structure; likewise the status of an official Cabinet Committee is sometimes changed to that of an ordinary inter-departmental Committee.

In 1948 the Board of Trade assumed responsibility for the Trade Negotiations Committee which had hitherto been an Official Cabinet Committee. See File 30/3/13.

37. General responsibility for reviewing the number of inter-departmental Committees and the demands they make on the time of officials rests with the Treasury. In the past, however, the Cabinet Office have on occasion been associated with them in efforts to secure a reduction in the number of Committees, largely because such reviews have been associated with similar reviews of Cabinet Committees.

See generally File 48/38.

In March, 1941 the Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill) circulated a note to Ministers in charge of Departments on the means of securing a reduction in the number of Committees and in the attendance at them. Each Minister was required to achieve a 25% reduction. The Prime Minister also laid down rules for the conduct of Committees including advisory and consultative bodies (W.P. (G) (41) 34).

In September, 1942 the Prime Minister asked for reports from Departments on the steps taken to reduce the number of Committees (W.P. (42) 419). These reports were rendered to the Secretary of the Cabinet and a consolidated return thereafter submitted to the Prime Minister. Subsequent reviews were made by the Treasury, the last in March, 1945 (Treasury Circular letter E.46009 of 21st March, 1945 - File 43/38 Pt.2.)

In 1947 the question of a further review was considered by the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of the Cabinet, but it was held that no good purpose would be served by the issue of a further circular to Departments. (See File 48/38 (Part 3)).
On the basis of the returns of inter-departmental committees complied for purposes of the reviews carried out during the Second World War the Treasury endeavoured to maintain a general index of Committees. No up to date index of this kind is at present in being. An index of Committees of a scientific and technical character is being compiled by the scientific secretariat in the Lord President's Office.