



HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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Dear Mr Vir

with compliments

*See Cols 15 & 16. Not very
exciting but at least it's
on the agenda. Many thanks.*

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

John T.

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Mr. Bottomley: The Commission reports as fully as it can. I doubt whether the trade unions and the management would like the conversations to be published. Most consultations are carried out in a way whereby we hope to achieve the best results without discussion on the Floor of the House.

INDUSTRY

British Leyland, Bathgate

17. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Industry what action he has taken as a result of the criticisms of his Department by the Committee of Public Accounts in relation to the disposal of assets at British Leyland, Bathgate.

The Minister of State, Department of Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): The report of the Public Accounts Committee, to which the hon. Member refers, is being studied by the Government. In line with normal practice, the Government's response will be given by way of a Treasury minute in due course.

Mr. Dalyell: In the view of Ministers were the criticisms of the Public Accounts Committee just or unjust?

Mr. Lamont: I cannot anticipate the reply that the Government will be making.

Education and Science

National Theatre Museum and Museum of Childhood

22. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement regarding the future of the National Theatre museum.

25. **Mr. Neubert** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has yet reached any conclusion on the proposals for the closure of the Museum of Childhood and abandonment of the Theatre museum project.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Paul Channon): I announced on 11 August the Government's conclusion that the proposed Theatre museum project in the Old Flower Market in London's Covent Garden should go ahead and that the Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green, should be retained.

Mr. Freud: Will the Minister accept that we are grateful to him for his courtesy in meeting the pro-museum delegation, that we congratulate him on his part in saving the project, and trust that he and his Department will now put all their good wishes behind the project?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his kind remarks. I assure him that we are determined that the project shall go ahead.

Mr. Neubert: I trust that my right hon. Friend is in no doubt about the gratitude of all of us who are concerned with these museums for the action he has taken to secure their future. However, does he agree that the proposals for closure, which went beyond the question of whether the museums are wastefully run to the political question of whether they should be run at all, have unnecessarily

raised doubts about Government support for the arts? Will he adopt the quickest means of removing those doubts by ensuring an adequate allocation for the Arts Council next year?

Mr. Channon: There is, I believe, a separate question on the Order Paper about that matter. No one can be under any doubt about the Government's support for the arts. If the Government had not bothered to support the arts, they would not have taken these two decisions. I was impressed, as were the whole Government, by the strength of representations from both sides of the House.

Mr. Christopher Price: The decision is to be welcomed. On reflection, however, does the Minister really believe that Rayner scrutiny exercises of this kind, carried out by a single, retired civil servant looking partially into the museum problem without taking an overall view, are serious and sensible?

Mr. Channon: One would obviously have to reflect before carrying that proposition further. I believe that the report that the House had to consider was a serious step. It raised serious issues which serious people would have to consider before coming to decide a rational allocation of funds. I should like to take this opportunity of saying that much of the criticism of the scrutineer who carried out the report was most unfair.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that members of the Select Committee are grateful to him for acting so speedily on their recommendations? Can we expect that he will act with similar sympathetic expedition on the report to be published tomorrow?

Mr. Channon: Is that not what is called a hypothetical question? We have not seen the report. Naturally, I shall do my best to keep on good terms with the Select Committee.

Mr. Whitehead: I also congratulate the Minister on the decision that he took. I thank him also for seeing the Labour Party delegation that visited him. Whatever he says in the House now, his decision will be seen as a proper rebuff to Mr. Burrett for his report. Will the Minister therefore publicly dissociate himself from recommendation 12 of Mr. Burrett's proposals to the effect that the two museums which were examined should now begin to charge, wholly or in part, for access to their collections?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have announced that we do not intend to impose charges for general admission to the main collections of museums. I do not wish, however, to prejudge the proposals that future trustees of museums might put forward as part of their policy for the good management of the museums. I do not wish to impose charges against the wishes of the museums.

Ethnic Minority Arts

23. **Mr. Tilley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make special additional funds available for ethnic minority arts.

Mr. Channon: Assistance for the arts is given through the Arts Council, which takes account of ethnic minority applications when considering its grant distribution. Funds are also allocated to arts projects by the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Tilley: Is the Minister not aware of the concern of many ethnic minority communities to maintain their own cultural heritage and so contribute to the cultural richness of multi-racial Britain? Is he not aware that they feel that they should be able to look to the Government for public funds to provide some of the help that is needed? Will the Minister also confirm that Sir William Rees-Mogg, the chairman of the Arts Council, in his letter to him on 31 August, suggested that there should be a specific allocation of funds in 1983-84 to help ethnic minority arts? Does he intend to agree to that suggestion?

Mr. Channon: Help for ethnic arts or indeed, any form of arts, is for the Arts Council to decide in the light of the funds received from the Government. I understand that the Arts Council wishes to give priority to arts provision that has relevance to ethnic minority communities. All these matters will have to be considered when the Arts Council allocation is settled.

Mr. Greenway: I back the call for support in respect of the arts for ethnic minorities. Will my right hon. Friend not agree, however, that, at a time of pressure on available funds, equal treatment must be given to all sections of the community when so many people are calling for help?

Mr. Channon: I believe strongly that this cannot be done on a per capita basis. All Arts Council grants must be assessed on the basis of artistic merit. It must not be done on a per capita basis. This must apply equally to ethnic arts projects as to any other.

Mr. Greville Janner: I accept that allocations cannot be made on a per capita basis. Does the Minister not accept, however, that in areas such as Leicester, with large ethnic minority communities, special care should be taken to see that cultural needs are looked after? Will he consult the governors of the BBC on the need for help to ensure that there are programmes in ethnic minority languages—in mother tongues—during those periods of local radio time which have been allocated to ethnic minority groups in general and to Asian communities in particular?

Mr. Channon: The last part of the hon. and learned Gentleman's question should be addressed to the Home Secretary. I am not responsible for the activities of the BBC. I agree that there is a problem over ethnic arts. The Arts Council takes it seriously and has commissioned a special paper and a special report. Everyone is agreed that worthwhile artistic projects should have support from the Arts Council.

European Music Year

24. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of the arrangements for European Music Year 1985.

Mr. Channon: The United Kingdom committee for European Music Year is already active under the chairmanship of his Royal Highness the Duke of Kent. The United Kingdom is also represented on the European organising committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and I should like to congratulate him on his untiring work in this field.

Mr. Jessel: I thank my right hon. Friend for his congratulations and, in turn, congratulate him and the Arts

Council on the fact that the British committee, in its preparations for 1985, is far ahead of all others. Apart from the major role of professional music in European Music Year, is it the intention of the Department of Education and Science to encourage local education authorities and schools to make a major musical effort in 1985?

Mr. Channon: This must be right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has approved, as a member of the United Kingdom committee for European Music Year, a staff inspector for music who has been asked to take the chair for education. I think that this well takes care of my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Beith: Would not the best contribution of the right hon. Gentleman's Department be to review the effect of cuts on instrumental music teaching and the provision of peripatetic music teachers in schools? Will he make use of European Music Year to take action?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman has a good point. I am also flattered that he should think that I shall still be Minister for the Arts in 1985.

Sir David Price: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is no country where amateur music-making is more important than the United Kingdom and that there is also no country where closer accord exists between amateur and professional music-makers? Will he ensure that amateur music-makers play an important part in his plans for European Music Year?

Mr. Channon: That is mainly a matter for the committee. I agree with my hon. Friend. Amateur music-makers are represented on the committee.

Mr. Pavitt: Will the activities of the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music be co-ordinated through the Arts Council? Will the Minister call for reports from time to time, prior to the commencement of European Music Year, to see what is happening in our major institutions?

Mr. Channon: The Royal Academy of Music and, also, I believe, the Royal College—although I will have to check—are represented on the committee that is organising European Music Year. Their views will be well known. I understand that the Royal College is represented. This need not go through the Arts Council. There will be full representation on the European Music Year committee.

Arts Council

26. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when last he met the chairman of the Arts Council; and if he will make a statement on the discussions which took place.

Mr. Channon: I met the chairman on 4 October, when we discussed various topics of mutual interest.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I should like to elucidate more details in respect of private patronage. Does he expect more encouragement for this important feature of the arts in consequence of actions to be taken by the Arts Council?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I very much hope so. The chairman of the Arts Council is keen to encourage private