



HOUSE OF LORDS

Liaison Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Review of Investigative and Scrutiny Committees

Wednesday 31 October 2018

11.15 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord McFall of Alcluith (The Chairman); The Earl of Courtown; Lord Foulkes of Cumnock; Lord Lang of Monkton; Lord Low of Dalston; Lord Smith of Hindhead; Lord Williams of Elvel.

Evidence Session No. 23

Heard in Public

Questions 165 - 173

Witnesses

[I](#): Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield FBA.

Examination of witness

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield.

Q165 **The Chairman:** Lord Hennessy, welcome to our evidence session on the review of committees. We are delighted that you have been able to give us your wisdom on the way forward. I know that you want to make a brief outline of your views, so the floor is yours.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Thank you very much. It is a great honour to appear before you.

I have a few preliminary thoughts. On what does the continuing value and utility of the House of Lords rest? Above all, I think it depends on our being a house of knowledge, which we display in two ways: through our scrutiny function and the deployment of our investigative Select Committees, both sessional and ad hoc, to maximum advantage.

Like any other storehouse of knowledge and experience, we have, I think, a prime duty to disseminate, to assist, indeed not just to influence Parliament's deliberations but to help to shape the wider national conversation too—to help the country make sense of how we have got to where we are in our national life and our international relations, and to offer a feel of what the great French historian Fernand Braudel once described as the "thin wisps of tomorrow" that are just discernible today.

We need, in short, to mobilise every particle of our thought and our analytical capacity, aided by a communications capability commensurate with that ambition. We must not hoard what we know and what we find out. The freeing up of the resources brought about by the partial dismantlement of our European constellation gives us a shining chance to refresh our committee arrangements that goes with the rich grain of the past but also cuts along new lines.

Over a quarter of a century ago, the Jellicoe committee recognised the considerable scope and reach of the Lords Select Committees, but was struck, I think quite strongly, by how this has been accomplished, as it put it, "without any coherent structure". There have been several improvements since then, but now is the moment to have another go and to strive for even greater coherence and reach.

Q166 **The Chairman:** Thank you very much for that explanation. You mentioned the issue of a national conversation, and I remember in a previous seminar with you that you illustrated that point. Why is it so important for us to have a national conversation?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: We live in a world where evidence-based policy and evidence-based discussion are not always in rich supply. This is very much an evidence-based House. One of the justifications for having a non-elected House of Lords is that you can bring people in who have been around the block a bit, to say the least, in the professions that they have held. They have had considerable experience before they come

in, either as politicians at the other end or in their own particular professions.

Perhaps this is overdoing it a bit, but we could be the best think tank in town, because we have the right to summon persons and papers, we have terrific back-up with the clerks, we have specific advisers and we have people who could bite on anything that comes up of almost any magnitude. One thing I was struck by after I came into the House in 2010—I thought I knew quite a bit about it having been a journalist for quite a long time—was that the depth of knowledge and expertise was even greater than I had imagined. We have to make maximum use of that. We can do that, and I think we already do; it is not a revolution we need, it is a very pointed and careful evolution.

The Chairman: Should we expand on with whom we have a conversation?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I think the country are our clients, are they not? The whole nation. Also, we have the educative function with the young, which we can come back to in a minute. I am sure we will come back and talk about how we might do that to greater effect. When you consider the accumulation of reports each year, I would value—and the country might as well—a six-monthly summary of what the Lords had found out and what the Lords had recommended, which in the days of electronic media can be disseminated everywhere.

When I was on the *Times*, long ago and far away, when we thought the first language of the readership was Latin, we were taught to write as if we were writing for the clever sixth-former in Wigan who had masses of curiosity but no prior knowledge. If we went down the route of, say, a six-monthly publication, written with bounce, it would be absorbable by the clever sixth-former, and I think that might help. It is just a small thought.

There is a tremendous degree of ignorance out there about how the House of Lords operates. Of almost all the national institutions, the moving parts of the constitution, we are the most wide open to parody, and through parody misunderstanding, and anything we can do on this front is our primary way of mitigating it.

The Chairman: That is an excellent idea.

Q167 **Lord Lang of Monkton:** In your short introductory remarks you demonstrated your justified reputation as a musician with words and a magician with analysis—

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is kind of you.

Lord Lang of Monkton: —and I think you struck a lot of chords even in that short time.

The come-back question tends to be: “Yes, but how?” May I ask you about two aspects: on broadcasting and the media? You know that the television programme on the House of Lords failed to make any reference to the committee structures at all, which must have been a deliberate,

wilful decision to play to their own picture of our activities and how they wanted to project them.

The second aspect is the form of the studies that we do. We tend to do longer studies rather than the short, focused tomorrow's-newspaper approach that inevitably happens in the House of Commons. We would not want to dilute the reputation for quality that our reports have, but how can we promote them more effectively? Is it the form of the reports and the timing of them, or is it the media itself, and how can we get round any perception and bias against us that exists?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is a crucial question. When I was a practising specialist journalist, there were about three committees that I used to watch very carefully for the *Times*. Cultivating a relationship with the Chair and some of the members, and indeed the clerks, and get to know them is a crucial element, because the churn among specialist journalists is not as great as it is among general reporters, and there is a symbiosis of interest.

Obviously, there are lines to be drawn because confidentiality comes into these things, of course it does, but if you make a friend of the specialist journalist, in the sense of letting them know what is coming up, what might be important and what they might be interested in, and flagging up the evidence sessions that they may not pick up otherwise, you get a relationship between the press bench and the committee which I think can be very productive. When I was a practising journalist, we had naturally very good relationships with successive chairmen of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee. We were not entirely specialist journalists but very largely. That is one way of doing it.

I am very keen on a mixed portfolio of the long, deep studies and the quicker ones. Walter Bagehot wrote an essay in the 1850s about Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, and he said that the key to Peel was that he always kept "a mind in reserve" that could be applied when unforeseen circumstances struck. I think our ad hoc committees are our mind in reserve, our ability each year to swing in on an area that is not necessarily covered by the Standing Committees.

You can have short, sharp inquiries that can still give the very highest quality indeed. We must not get drawn into headline chasing, because we are the more reflective thinking end of the whole process. We need a portfolio of products that can fit these circumstances, and I think we have that already.

Perhaps being a nerd by birth almost, I do not mind reading heavy-duty reports, and I rather like the way we disseminate them, but it does not work for everybody. This is me being a media tart, to be honest, but I think every committee ought to think about which are the couple of sentences they want to cling to the Velcro of memory and to be the key sentences for the leader writer of the newspaper concerned to focus on in thoughtful coverage of it. I am not sure that committees always strive to find those encapsulating sentences with a degree of vitality that leap off our pages and leap on to theirs.

Lord Lang of Monkton: Would you agree, though, that a more

important responsibility than getting our reports out into the public domain is to inform government and persuade it of the strength of the arguments that we are laying before it?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Absolutely, and I should have said that in my opening remarks because that is crucial. Indeed, unlike any other think tank, we are in the fortunate position that Governments have to reply to us within a fixed time.

Lord Lang of Monkton: They should do, yes.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: They should do. They do not always, but they cannot ignore us, so we have a very privileged position there.

In the end, it is the quality of ideas that works. I remember that wonderful line of Keynes at the end of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* where he says: "Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy" from "some defunct economist" of many years back. We have not to be defunct or many years back; we have to be current. Whoever is in authority, and however they distil their knowledge, our input should be crucial to that, which I think it is. We must not undersell ourselves.

Q168 **Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Peter, as you know, I have great respect for you and the work you do. However, we are not a think tank, and knowledge and experience is not the prime requisite. We are a second chamber of a legislature. I was talking with someone the other day who did not understand that we deal with all the legislation that the House of Commons deals with, in the same way and in such detail, and they could not believe that we have Members here who are not paid, who get no secretarial or research assistance and very little help in other ways. Do you know of any other second chamber in a bicameral legislature where the members are treated in the same way?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I do not. The paradox that we live off, and we do very well by, is that we are a house of amateurs, but deeply professionalised as well. We are sort of volunteers, are we not, in that sense?

I should have emphasised more in my opening remarks the scrutiny function, but we tend to think of that as our bread and butter. We do it very well. There is more care and attention in here than most second chambers apply, because of who we are and our strange mixture of backgrounds. You would not design the human inflows that make up this Chamber, but somehow they have considerable effectiveness.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: More than half the Members are from London. Most of them have other jobs doing something else and this is a sideline. Is that really the best way to run a second chamber of a legislature?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: It may be a sideline for some, but it is a sideline taken very seriously by them. I forget which Member of the Lords mentioned this to me when I first came in. I was trying to absorb how it

felt to be within the House as opposed to reporting it, but they said that we are a coalition of the willing and knowledgeable. Depending on the business, we descend on it, but in a different constellation of Members depending on the subject matter, and I think that is why it works very well.

Roughly speaking, on a normal day there are about 400 of us, but the make-up of the 400 changes according to the business. You would not design it like that. It is an extraordinarily eccentric way to choose a group of people for a second chamber. Essentially, it is a product of history. Nowhere else is there a mixture of blood with the hereditaries, piety with the Bishops, and the political charge of the great many.

I never know quite how to describe the Cross Benches without sounding presumptuous, but you would never design any institution where piety and blood mixed with professionalism and political high charge, would you? It is bonkers. It is not rather like that description in JK Galbraith's wonderful little book *American Capitalism* of the bumble bee. An aeronautical engineer would say that a bumble bee should not fly with wings that small and a body weight that size. It simply should never be airborne, but this does not seem to worry the bee; it just does it. I think we are a bumble bee chamber.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: As always, you describe it beautifully and poetically, as Lord Lang said, but I still disagree with you.

However, there is one other aspect that disturbs me about this Chamber, and that is that the legislature and the Executive do not seem to be clearly defined. There is an awful lot of interference by the Executive in the work of the legislature. Do you detect that and do you think that is a worry?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is a running theme in the British Parliament and always has been. As Clem Attlee once said of the H-bomb, "It needs watching". In fact, there are many Members of this Chamber who are very sensitised to it—including you, if you do not mind me saying so—and quite rightly too, but there are advantages in the Executive being drawn from the legislature. You know people much better that way, it reduces the chances of gridlock, and deals can somehow be done to keep the show on the road.

I have always been ambivalent in my thinking about that, but the Executive power grab is always lurking, is it not? The House of Lords is surely one of the great organised resistance movements in the western hemisphere. People spot that at some distance in this Chamber. We are a wonderful resistance movement. We disguise it in various ways, but that is what we are. We are a permanent awkward squad, are we not?

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I hope so. Thank you very much.

Q169 **Lord Smith of Hindhead:** You will be pleased to know that I have written down "Velcro of memory" on my piece of paper here, which I am hoping to use again at some point in the course of the day.

I liked your phrase that we “must not hoard knowledge”. I have served on three ad hoc committees and, even though I am a sideline Peer, as George described it, I somehow managed to get that done as well. I have sometimes been frustrated that once we have done our work, it does not have the wide public view which perhaps some of the committees in the other place have. That is not because of the subject but perhaps because the Lords is not a particularly sexy subject as far as the media is concerned.

What is your view of Peers with specialist knowledge or skills occasionally going down to the other place and serving on one of their committees, where a Peer could make a contribution and would get perhaps a slightly wider public view or audience, just for the reason that those committees tend to be reported on more than ours? Might that not help the reputation of the House of Lords and perhaps focus on the fact we have this expertise?

I am not suggesting that many MPs would want to come up here to serve on our committees; I think the traffic would be rather one way. But we have this expertise here and we should not hoard our power and knowledge, as you said. Could there perhaps be a benefit if a mechanism were put in place to do that?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is very interesting. We could become sort of interns in each other's systems. I defer to members of the Committee who have been MPs, I really do. I think there might be a bit of jealousy or amour propre. You sometimes see this on the Joint Committees anyway, which have a mixed record. Some do very well. I was on the Joint Committee on the pre-legislative scrutiny of the House of Lords Reform Bill 2012. That did not work particularly well as the atmosphere was sulphurous because of the very nature of the question, Lords reform being, as we all know, the Bermuda Triangle of British politics. Every two generations, a set of politicians disappears into the Bermuda Triangle and some never reappear. Others reappear but vowing one thing: never to go back in again. I think that committee was a bit doomed from the start.

Some are a bit of a disappointment. I do not want to be critical, but the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, for example, has terrific people on it, but it only meets one a month and its reports are not that frequent. The drum beat is much lower than the quality of the committee deserves, because it is a very high-quality committee. We all have our pet projects of what a new committee might be—

The Chairman: We will not let you go without mentioning it.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is one area that we can look at. It is very difficult, because the emotional geography of the two Houses internally is so different, and the emotional geography between them can also be very tricky. Many of you—I am not one, because I have not been a Member of Parliament—are naturally amphibious when it comes to understanding the two anthropologies and the difficult anthropology between. It is an intriguing thought. I do not think anybody has suggested that before.

Q170 **The Earl of Courtown:** You mentioned education in your opening remarks and how important that is to reach and scope and how far the work of the committees is expanded upon and spread.

The question at the back of my mind is: what is the purpose of these committees? Can we be an educator and hold government to account, which I think is one of the prime and most important features of the committee work in this House? As far as the reach of the committees is concerned, there is always a suspicion in my mind that it very often reaches the same class of individual, the same group of individuals, and it is very difficult to expand it further. How can we expand the reach of the committees while remembering that, in my view, the prime importance of the committees is to hold government to account?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Of course the only sure way of getting media attention is to have a frightful row, but that applies to all institutions. Having been a judge on some book prizes, for example, you get no coverage at all unless there is a huge falling out which somebody leaks, and that is not what we should be thinking about.

Maybe I am Pollyanna-ish about this, but when I graduated from college just under 50 years ago, 7.5% of my age group went to university—it is just touching 50% now—and I have always had the view, and I still have it, although it has not been fulfilled bountifully, that college education is not the be-all-and-end-all, but if you have a cohort of that size going through, surely the market for thoughtful, careful and analytical work increases.

Paradoxically, the quality newspapers have not flourished that much in recent years, for economic reasons, but in some ways they have not flourished because there has been a poverty of aspirations. Surely one can imagine a wider market for our committee, but you are right to keep bringing me back to the scrutiny function, which is the first and foremost function. Perhaps a think tank was not a very good metaphor, but when you think about it, not many institutions can call upon the resources that we can call upon as a matter of routine in our committee coverage.

Another problem which was touched on is the fact the media does not take much notice of the House of Lords unless it is showdown time, as you know because you are a Whip. Lord Marlesford and I worked on the *Economist* together in 1982. We shared a room, and it was a most happy period professionally because he was a wonderful roommate. I remember he said to me when I came here, "If ever you feel the need to blow an official secret without any danger, do it on the floor of the Chamber because nobody will ever pick it up".

The Chairman: In the incident with Peter Hain last week in the Chamber he made his personal statement at 2.43 pm, and it took the *Telegraph*, which had been working on the story, three-quarters of an hour to find out, so that perhaps makes your point.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: It makes the point rather powerfully, does it not?

Q171 **Lord Williams of Elvel:** Could we talk a little more about media attention? It seems to me that the Commons committees get quite a lot of media attention, not least because they are more confrontational than we are and they can summon senior Ministers. We cannot summon senior Ministers of the Commons because we are not allowed to. This means that Ministers come here by invitation that is accepted or they do not come. Since they come by accepted invitation, our meetings tend to be more emollient than they would otherwise be. If we could get a Secretary of State sitting in your place here and we were allowed to interrogate him as we might, even though politely we might get more media attention. Would you agree with that?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is profoundly true. Another factor affecting Commons committees is that the MPs tend to know the political correspondents as a matter of routine. We know quite a lot of them, but not in that strange way where the lobby lives with the House of Commons to a high degree, and where you get much more media attention to start with because of the quiet word, "You might find something interesting being said tomorrow morning; do turn up".

I would not want us to get rougher in style—I do not think you are suggesting that—because of all the legislative chambers in the world, courtesy is used as a weapon here, and I think it is a very powerful weapon.

Lord Williams of Elvel: I am talking about being slightly more pointed in some of our exchanges.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Pointed but courteous.

Lord Williams of Elvel: Certainly as polite as we all are. Nevertheless, we can be polite and pointed or we can be polite and banal. The latter is the often the case, I am afraid.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is very interesting. Maybe I have been lucky. I was on the Science and Technology Committee and I think we avoided banality and we were quite pointed, in a particular way, partly because that committee is dripping with fellows of the Royal Society, so it is bound to be forensically very gifted, is it not?

Lord Williams of Elvel: And you are batting on their wicket.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is right. I found the Science and Technology Committee absolutely fascinating for another reason: it is the most agreeable form of adult education I have ever experienced. I was on it as a token innumerate. I was truly privileged to be on it. That is the only one I have sat on for a proper span.

Q172 **Lord Low of Dalston:** Peter, I think we would be interested to hear about something you are peculiarly well placed to comment on. In your introduction, you spoke about committees participating in a conversation with the nation, not just talking to themselves. What is the value for committees to be derived from a conversation and interaction with the thinking parts of the nation, perhaps predominantly the academic world

and the research community but not exclusively? We would love to hear from you about how we can get value from that and, indeed, whether that is an area in which we should be particularly trying to develop a conversation and, if so, how we get best value out of it.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Thank you, Lord Low. I think we could make genuine friends and partners—in fact, we already do—with bodies such as the British Academy, of which I am a fellow, and the Royal Society and the Royal Society of Engineering, not just the S&T Committee but more widely across the piece. The British Academy covers all the arts and humanities and the Royal Society covers the scientific side. They know where the pockets of knowledge are in a way that is very hard to find out unless one is in the profession already. In my experience of being a fellow of the British Academy, they are more than delighted if they are summoned to the colours of Parliament one way or another as expert witnesses, or, indeed, as informal consultants about who we might turn to for specialist advice.

On the Braudel point I was making about horizon scanning and the thin wisps of tomorrow, would it be possible to think in terms of part of the remit of the team backing up the sessional Standing Committees being a horizon-scanning element to look at what might be coming that could be massively important and is just a little touch at the moment? The person designated to be on watch for that could deal with the better end of the think tanks, because some of them are pretty good at that, so that our committee structure can be right on the edge of everybody else; not looking for novelty for the sake of novelty, but having a sense of what might be preoccupying the country and Parliament in the years to come, in the near and middle future.

We could look to have a kind of Territorial Army reserve that can help us. It is very hard to know without the help of the learned societies which person in which university department is the exact person you might need to help with a particular inquiry. Think tanks, universities and learned societies are deeply flattered to be asked to help, so I think it would work quite naturally if we went that route.

Lord Low of Dalston: Academics are particularly well placed to exercise a strong influence within the committees, because as often as not they will provide the expert advisers to the committees.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Yes, exactly, but the tricky bit is discovering the young up-and-coming ones. Quite often, understandably, the academic help that is sought is from those who are deep into their professional lives, which is as it should be, but if you can find a very clever post-doctoral student who is way ahead, that would be useful.

When I was supervising PhD students, I used to expect the best of them within three weeks to know more than I did about their subject, and invariably they did. Baroness Hayter, who I think is a member of this committee, was one of my best ever PhD students, and she certainly passed that test—not that she was a young post-doc when she came to me, she was a mature student and an extraordinarily wonderful person to teach. Lord Low, you know from your own experience just how stunningly

good the young post-docs can be, but we do not pick them up soon enough, is what I am perhaps suggesting.

The Chairman: Horizon scanning is an idea that we will look at.

Q173 **Lord Lang of Monkton:** You have touched on some aspects of the topic I was about to raise, which is the structure of committees, so I will broaden the question I was going to ask slightly and ask: if you were starting with a clean sheet, how would you build a committee structure in the House of Lords? Would you shadow departments or shadow particular subjects? Would you take a thematic approach? Would you enable committees to appoint sub-committees in certain areas or even co-opt specialists in a particular subject for the purpose of one particular inquiry, such as a soldier or a surgeon—whoever might have the expertise that a committee might like to have on its own side rather than as a witness? Have you any thoughts on that in a broad sense?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That would be a good idea.

The Chairman: Can I add to that question? On the last couple of occasions I came along to them, you were a participant in the British Academy seminars, led by Lord Stern, on the structure of committees. Could you incorporate your comments on Lord Stern's proposals into your answer to Lord Lang's question?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That was very much the thematic approach: to try to think of perhaps six areas of running concern to the country, society and the world, and to go broad in that sense, but also to have the capacity through the sub-committee appointments to go narrower into a bore hole—in the good sense of going into a bore hole. I had not thought of the power to co-opt a really knowledgeable person who was not a Member of either House, but that is a tremendously good thought.

Lord Lang of Monkton: Or even from within the House for the purpose of one particular inquiry.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Absolutely; knowledge from this House for a particular inquiry would be very good.

I do not know what the constitutional position is concerning somebody co-opted to sit where you are who is not a Member of either House.

Lord Lang of Monkton: Nor do I.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: What we perhaps need is what Philip Zeigler once said to my MA students: that the British constitution depends almost entirely on instantly invented precedents. If we were designing afresh, we could do that.

However, the main test is effectiveness. That is always very difficult to measure. All the best things in life are beyond the measurement of Treasury performance indicators, as we all know. Given our own resources, being able to measure our impact is very difficult indeed, but

that is no reason for not thinking high, wide and handsome. If you were starting afresh, it would be very interesting.

I am not sure what I think is the best number on a committee. I have the feeling that some are a bit too large. You need a combination of bite and intimacy on a committee, which is quite hard to do. A problem with the Joint Committees is they are almost invariably rather large.

Lord Lang of Monkton: You also have to straddle the party representation to avoid a partisan result coming out.

The Chairman: We are taking that issue forward in the next few months with seminars, and hopefully we will have Lord Stern along looking at the structure of committees, so we look forward to your involvement there.

You mentioned the constitutional position. I am also chairman of the Procedure Committee on whether the Standing Orders are to be changed, so I will take that back directly.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: So you could invent a precedent.

The Chairman: I have had informal discussions with the House of Commons about looking at the issue of parliamentary scrutiny, not just in the House of Lords but the House of Commons, and I got some very positive feedback from the chairperson of the Liaison Committee, Sarah Wollaston, and Frank Field. Frank Field, in his position on the Work and Pensions Select Committee, said that during the Carillion inquiry he would have loved Members of the House of Lords who have experience in corporate governance and pensions to be on his committee for a certain time. We are looking at that. There are issues associated with it, but I suppose you would think that was a good idea.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I certainly would, yes. While we are on the theme of the Commons, I have never been bothered that much by overlap. We can get a little too precious about that. When you look at the instant success of the international relations sessional committee, some might see that as cutting across the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Commons, but I am not sure it does, again because the anthropologies of the two Chambers are so different that it is a different set of minds and backgrounds on the same themes. We have perhaps been hypersensitive to that in the past.

The Chairman: From my discussions with MPs they appear quite relaxed about it. I have spoken to the chairs of the Defence, Treasury and Health committees, the Work and Pensions Committee, and other committees, and I think we could find a rich seam there.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: That is very encouraging. There are two areas that I think would benefit from having a Standing Committee. The first is the one that Lord Hollick presses very persuasively, which is the industrial strategy. Everybody is signed up to the need for one of those. We are now living through the eighth industrial strategy since 1945. At the moment all parties think that is necessary. That is a big running theme, and we have a lot of people in here who would bring a lot to that.

The second area is defence and national security. If you look at the National Security Council's *National Security Capability Review* of last June, there is an extraordinary width to how the old Cabinet Office Overseas and Defence Secretariat has developed. We need to reflect the way the Government do it, and I think the National Security Secretariat and National Security Council is a reform of David Cameron's that will endure. Given the background of many people in our Chamber, they are absolute naturals for that. Of course, that would overlap with foreign affairs in the Commons, and with defence, and to some extent with international development.

Also, the new Cabinet Secretary's fusion approach to policy-making very much reflects the new National Security Secretariat realities. We need to catch up with that. If we were designing afresh, we could do that. As the House of Lords, we should have had that ever since Arthur Balfour invented the Committee of Imperial Defence. The National Security Council is just the old Committee of Imperial Defence with better IT, as far as I can see—it is a very Arthur Balfour institution—but the House of Lords did not go in for Select Committees much at the beginning of the last century.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I am very glad that you mentioned the success of the International Relations Committee, but it is indicative of some of the difficulties of getting change in this place that it took us three years to overcome the objections from the establishment in this place to setting it up. We have to take that into account. You probably think of me as a continuing rebel and trouble maker. We need them here.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: One of my favourite books of AJP Taylor is called *The Trouble Makers*.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: You mentioned the National Security Committee, but the Intelligence and Security Committee is a very good Joint Committee of both Houses, appointed by the Government. Do you not think it is astonishing that of the two Members of the House of Lords on that committee, there is no one from the Official Opposition?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: There used to be. I think the Labour Party very kindly gave it up so that a Cross-Bencher could take the place.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: No, we did not.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: You did not. There was a degree of coercion, was there?

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: No, we sought a place on it and did not get it.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: One of the things that worries me about that committee, as you know Lord Foulkes, because we have talked about it, is we do not routinely debate their reports any more. We used to debate them every year, but we have got out of the habit of doing that. I think that innovation has worked. It has developed mightily since 1994 when it was created.

I am trying to think of an example of a new committee—I know it is sui generis in terms of security and it is like none of the others for a variety of reasons—but when you look at the Standing Committees we have created, they have nearly all worked out very well.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: The last time we debated the Intelligence and Security Committee, I was on it and I had to report to the Grand Committee. I do not think we have had a debate since then.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I think we might have had one since then which we both spoke in, and I remember it because we sat next to each other.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Who answered on behalf of the committee?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Lord Ancram.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Michael Ancram. We have had one.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I think so. We have got out of the habit of that, which is a great pity because it continually matters, and the reports are fascinating.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: They are.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: They are classically an example of what we have been touching on a lot this lunchtime. When I was a young journo in the old days, in the late 1970s, when Whitehall was amazingly buttoned up compared to how it is now, if you leaked the existence of a Cabinet committee let alone its Cabinet Office classification number, there was very often a leak inquiry. So much more is disseminated now. We forget just how tight a system it was in the late 1970s. We now get all this cornucopic reporting on areas that were of maximum sensitivity in the Cold War. Of course, they are still sensitive, but in our lifetime of looking at the secret world there has been a transformation in the way information is put out there. It is very rarely picked up, which amazes me.

The Chairman: You mentioned earlier that you wanted to come back to the issue of the education of the young. Could you do that and include the issue of the review of committees, in your view, being linked to the reputation of the House and increasing its reputation?

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I think it was your idea, Chairman, when we were talking the other day. That if we had a six-monthly review of the output of committees and the House of Lords' findings, you could easily send it to every sixth-former in the country, not just those doing politics A-level. The Science and Technology Committee, for example, does stuff that is relevant to the scientific and technological side of life.

I think we all find, when we have groups of students coming in from schools or from universities, that they are pleasantly surprised by this Chamber when we show them things and the things that we do. The

electronic revolution means that we can reach people almost cost-free instantly, so that is the way I would do it.

The education outreach scheme is very good whereby people go and talk to schools and all the rest of it. The trouble, again, when you make these visits is that for at least half of the session you have to get the students to go beyond the parody view of us. The only picture they ever see in the newspapers is us in scarlet dressing gowns. We are kind of the last Ealing comedy that was never made—not that they know these days what Ealing comedies are.

The Chairman: Are there any other comments? No. Lord Hennessy, that was a fascinating discourse, and your views will be very helpful to us in formulating our approach on the review of committees. Thank you very much for taking the time. The quality of your evidence was overwhelming.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Thank you very much. It was a pleasure.