

POLITICAL HONOURS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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45. Mr. Emrys Hughes asked the Prime Minister what is the nature of the duties of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Harold Macmillan) This Committee was instituted in 1923, in accordance with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Honours, to advise the Prime Minister of the day whether individuals whose names are to be submitted for honours for political services are fit and proper persons to be so recommended.

Mr. Hughes Would the Prime Minister say why membership of this Committee is confined purely to members of the House of Lords? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he has any evidence at all that this Committee has met and done its job of scrutinising and vetting during the last five years? Is he further aware that there is an opinion in Scotland that the best way to political honour, to a knighthood or a baronetcy, is to be a deaf and dumb member of the Scottish Grand Committee?

The Prime Minister The Committee, which consisted of Lord Templewood, Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Lord Thurso, commanded general respect. On the death of Lord Templewood, Lord Crookshank has been appointed to take his place. The Committee reports every time there is an Honours List and all names are scrupulously sent to it. The last report that I received was on 12th May this year.

Mr. Shinwell As a matter of interest, could the right hon. Gentleman define what is meant by the term, "honour awarded for political services rendered"?

The Prime Minister If the right hon. Gentleman will look at the Report of the Royal Commission of Honours of 1922, Cmd. Paper 1789, he will see that it sets out with great skill and clarity all the different kinds of honours that are given in the different ways. I think that Prime Ministers have found this Committee one which serves them, and I think that all Prime Ministers since that time have scrupulously observed the regulations which were laid down by Order in Council.

Mr. Shinwell I am very sorry, but this is a matter of public interest. Can the right hon. Gentleman answer the simple question of what is meant by the expression, "honour awarded for political services rendered"? What are the political services?

The Prime Minister I would hesitate to try and summarise in a single sentence the 34 paragraphs of this Report, but if the right hon. Gentleman does not have a copy with him at the moment I will see that one is sent to him and that his attention is drawn to the particular paragraphs that try to make this definition.