

SECURITY OF WORKING GROUP PROCEDURE

When the various Working Groups were set up in Washington during the Prime Minister's visit in October, 1957, it was agreed with the Americans that both sides should do their utmost to prevent any disclosure of the decision to establish them. Subsequently Sir Norman Brook asked the Whitehall departments concerned to arrange that the full details of these arrangements were kept within the smallest practicable circle.

2. In making this point Sir Norman Brook pointed out that the Ministers and officials concerned would of course have to know of the Working Groups which concerned them and that some Commonwealth Governments would also have to know how Anglo-American consultation was being conducted on some subjects of special interest to them. But what we wanted to do was to keep within the smallest possible circle the knowledge that this method of consultation by joint working groups was being applied systematically over a wide range of problems.

3. The secret has been well kept. Indeed it is for consideration whether it is not being kept too well, in that there may be officials in the various Departments concerned who do not know of the existence of a particular Working Group, and if they did, might be able to contribute to its work. Subject always to the needs of security, there is positive advantage in familiarising all officials, who deal with problems of Anglo-American interest, with the practice of Anglo-American consultation and with the machinery through which it is conducted. Only in this way can we build up and establish the habit of consultation.

4. As Sir Norman Brook made clear in the instruction referred to in paragraph 2 above, the main security problem is to limit the knowledge that there exists regular machinery for systematic consultation over a wide range of problems. The principal reason for this is to avoid giving our other friends and allies the impression that an exclusive Anglo-American "directoriate" has been set up to dispose of all the world's problems. It is thus less important to limit the knowledge that any one Working Group exists. It is of course true that a series of leaks about individual Groups would amount to a leak about the whole system, but the experience of the last fifteen months suggests that this is improbable, and if, as is suggested in paragraphs 5-9 of the Progress Report, formal machinery for dealing with political problems may gradually be abandoned in favour of informal consultation, the risk will thereby become less.

5. It is suggested therefore that the Departments principally concerned with the active Working Groups (Defence, Information and Joint Economic Measures) should be authorised to extend the knowledge of these Working Groups individually to any of their officials who, in their opinion, could usefully contribute to their work. The existence of the Working Groups would remain Secret.

Foreign Office, S.W.1.

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