

INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES (PARKER COMMITTEE'S REPORT)

The Prime Minister (Mr. Edward Heath): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will now make a statement about the Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors under the chairmanship of Lord Parker of Waddington. This report is published today; and copies are now available in the Vote Office. The Government have not found it necessary to omit any passage on grounds of security; and the report is published with only minor amendments which do not in any way affect the sense.

The terms of reference of the Committee were to inquire whether, and if so in what respects, the procedures currently authorised for the interrogation of persons suspected of terrorism, and for their custody while subject to interrogation, require amendment. The Government are indebted to Lord Parker and his colleagues for the scrupulous care with which they have examined this very difficult subject.

The Committee found itself unable to agree; and it has therefore submitted a majority report signed by Lord Parker and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston-upon-Thames (Mr. Boyd-Carpenter), together with a minority report signed by Lord Gardiner.

The majority find that the methods in question, which had been applied on a number of occasions in the past under successive Governments in various parts of the world, were applied in Northern Ireland in August, 1971, to 12 detainees, and in October to two more. They consider—and I quote—that

“there is no doubt that the information obtained by these two operations directly and indirectly was responsible for the saving of lives of innocent citizens”.

They conclude that the use of the methods involved could be justified in exceptional circumstances subject to further safeguards which they recommend. They consider, however, that the use of these techniques in some, if not all, cases would offend against English law; but they refrain from expressing any view about the position in Northern Ireland where legal proceedings which raise this issue are pending. Lord Gardiner in the minority report considers that these

methods are objectionable in all circumstances.

The Government, having reviewed the whole matter with great care and with particular reference to any future operations, have decided that the techniques which the Committee examined will not be used in future as an aid to interrogation.

Mr. Harold Wilson: Is the Prime Minister aware that, in accordance with our usual practices in these matters, I can confirm fully that the amendments made on security grounds were entirely marginal and made no difference to the sense of the report?

Secondly, has the right hon. Gentleman noticed reports which have said that these techniques have not been used since the Parker Committee was set up? Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether that is so? I do not think that it comes out in the report itself.

Thirdly, while hon. Members will want to study the report and while every hon. Member faced with this very difficult problem will decide whether to accept in principle the argument of the majority or that of the minority, is the Prime Minister aware that I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, greatly welcome the announcement in the concluding part of the right hon. Gentleman's statement? It is a wise announcement in all the circumstances, and it may make more than a marginal difference to the possibility of stabilising and improving the situation in Northern Ireland. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that at the end of the two-day debate last November my right hon. and hon. Friends voted on this matter because of Compton, and, naturally, we are extremely pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has taken this wise decision?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that these techniques have not been used in cases other than those mentioned in the majority report; namely, the 12 in August, 1971 and the two in October, 1971.

Mr. Grimond: I, too, wish to congratulate the Government on their decision that these techniques should now be abandoned. May I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether there must not be some disquiet about the fact that some