

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 30 October 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE 27th Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

*Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Judith Evans

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 3

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Tuesday 30 October 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting in private at 14:35*]

14:35

Meeting continued in public.

Scottish Ballet

The Convener (Karen Gillon): Before we begin consideration of item 4, which relates to our Scottish Ballet inquiry, I must inform members with some regret that a committee report has been leaked prior to publication.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Where?

The Convener: In yesterday's edition of *The Scotsman*. It is beginning to appear as if this committee cannot produce a report without that report finding its way into the public domain. That undermines confidence in the committee and members' confidence when they are considering reports. Over the weekend I refused to speak to journalists about the report on our Scottish Ballet inquiry, despite being under considerable pressure from them to do so. Now I find that details of the report have appeared in a newspaper.

I am not sure what to do about the situation. On the previous occasion that this happened, a leak inquiry was carried out by the standards adviser but it was unable to find the source of the leak. However, it is important to put on record what has happened, as the article in *The Scotsman* undermines our report, paragraphs 121 and 126 of which it quotes directly. It would seem that the journalist responsible for the article has seen a copy of our report, but they fail to understand that the recommendations are the recommendations of our report on the national companies inquiry and not recommendations of this report. According to the article, we suggest that Scottish Ballet may be undermining Scottish Opera, which runs contrary to the rest of our report.

I thought that I had to bring this matter to the attention of the committee and to place it on the public record, so that members would be aware of my concerns about the leak and the effect that it

has on committee members' confidence in one another and in the process.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I concur with everything that you have said, convener. As I told you earlier, I spent two hours on Sunday night going through the report and annotating it, having over the past week—indeed, over the past few weeks—resisted the blandishments of a range of journalists to talk to them about it. I was extremely annoyed and depressed to discover on Monday that a journalist had had sight of something that appears in our report. That is intolerable. It undermines the work that each of us is doing and the ability that we have demonstrated on the committee to work together across party lines. It also undermines the confidence of those who put their trust in the committee to undertake inquiries and to deal with those properly and in the manner that will be most helpful to them.

Today we will in private session finalise our work on the report. I am minded to ask to have this matter referred to the Standards Committee so that another leak inquiry can be carried out. However, I know perfectly well what would happen—everyone involved would be talked to, but nothing would happen as no one would admit to anything.

I find this a depressing part of being a member of the committee as, 99 per cent of the time, being a member of the committee is a positive experience. However, that 1 per cent of the time overshadows the other 99 per cent. I associate myself and the Scottish National Party entirely with your remarks, convener.

The Convener: Thank you. Since the leaked information appeared in the press, I have been contacted on numerous occasions by Duncan McGhie. I have not spoken to him, as I did not feel that that was appropriate, but I understand his concerns. He came to the committee in good faith, and we have subsequently broken that trust.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I share the concerns that have been expressed by you, convener and by Mike Russell. As a member of the Standards Committee, I know that the difficulty when a matter is referred to the Standards Committee is that a guy spends his time beavering away, returns with an inconclusive report and then the matter is sent back to us and we are told that no action can be taken because we cannot get to the bottom of things.

We have been discussing whether committees should be able to take action on such matters. That suggestion has been raised with the conveners group, but the idea did not go down well initially. There might be a broader discussion to be had about that—perhaps that reaction was

down to the convener who made the suggestion.

The Convener: For clarification, it was the convener of the Standards Committee who raised the issue.

Mr McAveety: The inquiry process is being undermined by such leaks. We are at only the first stage of evaluating the document and have not reached any conclusions.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): For form's sake, I put on record the fact that I agree with everything that has been said. I associate myself with all those comments.

Mr Monteith: Not wishing to be left out, for obvious reasons, I concur with your comments, convener. It would be possible to safeguard the committee from such difficulties in the future by ensuring that each copy of a report was marked in such a way as to reveal itself if it was reprinted. I should be happy to discuss that with you at another time, convener. We must try to find some other response than simple condemnation of the action.

The Convener: Yes. I would like to discuss with the clerks and others ways in which we can safeguard the integrity of the committee. We have worked well together and I do not want anything like this to happen again, as it undermines the confidence that we have in one another. We have had full and frank discussions in the committee, and it does nothing for the confidence of the committee if reports are leaked before we have considered them in any detail.

We will put that matter to rest and move back into private session.

14:42

Meeting continued in private until 16:10.

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