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THE PRIME MINISTER

1 February 1988

Jean Robin.

Thank you for your letter of 12 January about the disruption to prayers on the previous day.

I certainly share your concern about the kind of behaviour we have seen recently in the House and I deplore it. I should hope that the overwhelming majority of Members in all parts of the House take that view. However, as John Wakeham said during Business Questions on 14 January, the question of any suspension of a named Member's pay would essentially be a matter for the House. He undertook to try to find time for a debate if there is a strong wish in the House for one.

John also pointed out that if the naming of a Member carried with it the equivalent of a substantial fine this would have serious implications for the Speaker. Such a rule could well, for example, lead to pressures for change in the procedures and perhaps some form of inquiry before the penalty was confirmed. Furthermore, while a named Member may undoubtedly enjoy a brief period of notoriety, if he were to seek suspension a second time (on the second occasion, as you know, a suspension lasts twenty sitting days), I do not think his constituents would be impressed.

VC

These are considerations which Members will wish to weigh before forming a view. But I fully understand your reasons for raising the matter with me.

Yours
Ragland

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