Indexing a Government journal

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Introduction

Survey of Current Affairs (SCA), a monthly journal of background information on Government policy and current news, is published by the Central Office of Information (COI), and averages some 410 pages annually, 24-52 per issue. Aimed mainly at an overseas readership, each issue is divided into five groups of articles under the headings:

- Government and Administration
- External Affairs and Defence
- Economic and Scientific Affairs
- Social and Cultural Affairs
- Documentation

The staff writers, graded as Government information officers, who are also responsible for other COI publications, are specialists in their own fields. A sample taken from the issue for May 1986 includes, in the first group, a report on recent by-elections and the state of the political parties in Parliament. External Affairs and Defence leads with an article on 'Libya and International Terrorism', followed by 'Soviet Nuclear Accident', and a report of the House of Commons debate on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. Economic and Scientific Affairs covers such items as the Tokyo economic summit, monetary policy, recent legislation, and a review of Britain's offshore oil and gas production. Social and Cultural Affairs, in this number, looks at primary health care services and the changes affecting social security. The last section, Documentation, is a bibliography of recent Government and related publications, such as White Papers, Green Papers, Select Committee reports, together with COI-published reference pamphlets. Those papers that receive fuller treatment elsewhere in the journal are cross-referenced with page numbers.

The quality of production and the standard of writing are high, with strict adherence to departmental style rules.

Organization of index

The Index is produced as a separate publication, in the same format as the monthly journal, and appears twice a year: January-June and, cumulatively, January-December, with the August and February issues of SCA. It is set in 7pt on Univers type, three columns to a page, the annual cumulation making an average 26 printed pages.

Authors' names are not given in the journal, so are of course not cited in the index.

The mainheads reflect the wide range of topics covered, beginning (in a recent Index) with Accidents and ending with Zimbabwe. Below the mainhead the subheadings summarize the story, followed by indented sub-subheadings where necessary pinpointing the detail.

For example:

Companies
- Bankers Clearing House, 20
- business taxation
- Budget proposals, 117-18
- government reforms, 45
- Companies Act 1985, 95

The titles of publications, indexed from the Documentation pages, are set in italics beneath the mainhead (the page numbers referring to Documentation items are also italicized):

Companies
- small firms
- Burdens on Business: Report of a Scrutiny of Administrative and Legislative Requirements, 128-9, 143

The system of indentation runs when necessary to several levels of sub-subheading. One indentation is saved by setting the main headings in bold type with capital initial. This sufficiently distinguishes them from the first subheadings, which are set flush left in normal type with lower-case initial (except for proper names).

Characteristics of index

The principle of this index's structure is classification, so that it serves as a reference catalogue collating and listing all items published in SCA on given topics. Its grouping is opposite to traditional indexing practice, as it brings all references together in long lists under major, general headings rather than dispersing them under specific headings, and its cross-references point up from the specific to the general, not vice versa. This necessitates many cross-references of different types:

Civil List
see Royal Family

Immigration
see Race relations and immigration

simply indicate that these minor topics are subsumed under the larger groupings.

Chemical weapons 13, 103-4, 177, 178-9, 376
see also Arms control and disarmament

is of the type where undifferentiated page numbers are
INDEX January–December 1985
armed forces
Acceptance of Outside Appointments by Crown Servants, government observations on Select Committee report, 143
armaments and equipment
improvements and plans, 180-1
equipment procurement co-operation, 179
Ethiopian relief assistance, 182, 233
manpower reductions, 40
personnel, 40, 181-2
Prime Minister (Mrs M. Thatcher), speech, US Congress, 20 February, 71-2
research and development, 181, 228
Reserve Forces (Safeguard of Employment) Act 1985, 255
reserves, 181-2, 255
salaries, higher officers, Review Body’s report, 251-3, 281
BAOR, capabilities, 180-1
Britain’s Defence Policy (COI reference paper), 247
Britain’s Defence Services (COI reference pamphlet), 395
budget 1985-86, 183
Central Europe, defence estimates statement, 180-1
conventional forces, 178, 184, 226-7, 247, 378
Defence Commitments and Resources and the Defence Estimates 1985-86, Select Committee report, 247
equipment sales abroad, 183
estimates 1985, 167, 177-83
European co-operation, 100
Falkland Islands
airport, 182
garrison, 182
military commission, 109
public expenditure, 37
The Future of the Royal Dockyards, Select Committee report, 281
home defence, 180, 181-2
maritime forces, defence estimates statement, 181, 182
mine countermeasures, 180
Ministry of Defence personnel reduction, 182
NATO and Britain, 179, 180
NATO strategy, 12-14, 182, 184-5, 226-8
regions, defence estimates statement, 180-1
non-NATO commitments, 182
Northern Ireland, defence estimates statement, 182
nuclear deterrent
defence estimates statement, 177-8, 180
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary (Sir G. Howe), statement, UN, 25 September, 308
intercontinental strategic nuclear forces, 14, 179, 180, 183, 378
intermediate-range nuclear forces, 10, 11, 12-13, 14, 101, 177, 183, 226, 308, 378
Non-Proliferation Treaty, 228-9, 231, 291-3, 308
Strategic Defence Initiative, 11-12, 101, 102, 178, 226, 227, 377
US cruise missiles
NATO deployment, 14, 101, 177, 183, 378
US Pershing II missiles
NATO deployment, 14, 101
overseas bases, 182
public expenditure, 37, 183, 388, 389
Strategic Defence Initiative, 11-12, 101, 102, 178, 226, 227, 377
Trident missiles, 177, 183
The Use of Merchant Shipping for Defence Purposes, Select Committee report, 247
see also North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
Defence Planning Committee, 13-14, 227
see also North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
Design Council
annual report 1984-85, 328
Awards, 80
design advisory service funded consultancy scheme, 357
design strategy, 357-8
Innovation: A Study of the Problems and Benefits of Product Innovation, 228
Innovation Centre, 321-2
Policies and Priorities of Design, report, 29
Détole, 10
see also East-West relations
Developing countries
aid, 35-6, 57, 71, 73-4, 98, 107, 150-3, 188, 233, 261-8, 281, 307, 313-14, 389
Aid Trade Provision, 151, 152, 262, 263, 283, 313, 314, 318
Bonn economic summit statement, 157
British Aid Statistics 1980-84, 261, 281
British Council’s work, 264, 268-9, 281
British Overseas Aid 1984, 261, 281
Caribbean, 187, 188
Commonwealth Development Corporation, 152, 153, 186-7, 213, 262-3
Development Assistance Committee Development Co-operation: 1984 Review, 87
membership and work, 262
exports to, 123, 151-3, 391
finance
debt rescheduling, 321
financial flows, Commonwealth statement, 339-40
General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, 150, 158
imports from, 123, 151-3
International Development Association, 263, 265, 336n
International Monetary Fund, 107
Lomé Convention
Lomé III signed, 265
The Third Lomé Convention (COI reference paper), 57, 265
manpower assistance, 262
Manpower Centres Scheme, 264
official development assistance, 262
Overseas Development Administration
British overseas aid, 35, 57, 261-8, 281
Disaster Unit, 263
Joint Funding Scheme, 264-5
Manpower Centre Scheme, 264
research and development programme, 35, 57, 261-8, 391
training schemes, 264
Tropical Development and Research Institute, 266
overseas direct investment, 150-3, 157, 192-5
Prime Minister (Mrs M. Thatcher), speech, Washington, 20 February, 71
programme aid, 262, 263
project aid, 262, 263
Regional Development Banks, 265, 266
Development land tax
Budget forecasts and estimated outturn, 117
Budget proposal, 113, 117
Diplomatic immunities and privileges
The Abuse of Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges, Select Committee report, 153
issues raised
diplomatic bags, 154-5
diplomatic immunity, 155
diplomatic premises, 154
measures to prevent abuse, 154
size, 154
foreign mission staff, 154
international action against terrorism, 154
Vienna Convention, government view, 153
Home Secretary (Mr L. Brittan), speech, London, 15 July, 258
Disabled and handicapped attendance allowance, 242
Community Care with special reference to adult mentally ill and mentally handicapped people, government response to Select Committee report, 396
invalid care allowance, 242
invalidity allowance and other disability benefits, 242
mobility allowance, 242
Severe Disablement Allowance, 242
Docks
see Ports
Drugs
Controlled Drugs (Penalties) Act 1985, 254
drug misuse, international co-operation
Commonwealth statement, 340-1
Under-Secretary of State, speech, Geneva, 2 October, 323-4
Drug Misuse: Prevalence and Service Provision, report, 248
Drug Misuse and the Young. A Guide for teachers and youth workers, 248
heroin misuse, government campaign against, 86
Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985
provisions, 245
Royal Assent, 245, 254
second reading, Commons debate, 245
Misuse of Drugs with special reference to the treatment and rehabilitation of misusers of hard drugs, Select Committee report, 248
Misuse of Hard Drugs, Select Committee report, 214
strung together following the minor topic, but these same references are qualified in detail under the major one:

**Arms control and disarmament**
arms control talks, Geneva, 7–8 January, 12
British statements, 12
chemical weapons
British policy, 178–9
British verification proposals, 104
Foreign and Commonwealth Minister (Mr R. Luce), speech, Geneva, 12 March, 103–4
NATO policy, 13
Soviet Union, 103, 177, 178–9, 376
United States, 103, 178, 376
Conference on Confidence and Security-building Measures and Disarmament in Europe . . .

**Training** in the 1985 index has 3 lines of undifferentiated page numbers, with see also Employment, under which all these references are repeated with full detail.

**Select Committees** has four lines, see also Parliament; under that heading the Select Committee reports are specified, as well as under the headings for the topics they relate to.

The names of organizations are listed with page numbers only (e.g. **National Coal Board**), with relevant detailed information listed under the appropriate subject heading (Coal industry).

The index is both a finding aid and a demonstration of the degree of coverage of major topics. Very large entries are amassd under such set headings as: **Arms control and disarmament**: Defence (which includes armed forces as a subhead); **Employment** (with both training and unemployment as subheads); **Environment and pollution control**; **Science and technology** (with research and development as a subhead).

Entries may be repeated under several main headings. **Report on Research and Development 1983–84** of the Overseas Development Administration is entered under:

**Aid**
research and development
developing countries [full title given]

**Developing countries**
aid [a page reference only here]

**Overseas Development Administration** [page ref.]

**Science and technology**
research and development
British aid [page ref.]

Large blocks of cross-references are given, as under *Economy*

see also Banks, European Community, Exports, Imports, Incomes, International Monetary Fund, Investment, National income, Public expenditure, Sterling and Taxation and duty

Persons are indexed not under name but in parentheses against the office held. As **Survey of Current Affairs** is a permanent journal of record, a researcher in years to come, perhaps not recalling the name of the officeholder in question, is helped in this way:

**United Nations**
Lebanon
Security Council debate, 28 February–12 March
Britain’s views, 108–9
Foreign and Commonwealth Minister (Mr R. Luce), speech, Commons, 14 March, 109

The Prime Minister is given a separate mainhead, although the items below are also indexed elsewhere under topic:

**Prime Minister** (Mrs M. Thatcher)
speeches and statements
Bonn economic summit, Commons, 7 May, 156
European Cup Final disaster, Commons, 3 June, 210
US Congress, Washington, 20 February, 70–2

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary’s speeches and statements are indexed under the mainhead **Foreign policy**, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s under **Economy**.

Entries of speeches include place and date (plus year, if previous year to that of index) of meeting, thus:

**Foreign policy**
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary
(Sir G. Howe), speeches
European Community, Milan, 7 March, 98–100
Falkland Islands and British-Argentine relations, Commons, 14 March, 110–11

**Indexers**
The qualities required in the indexer are pretty much the same as for those in other fields: sub-editorial experience is useful, with the ability to compress detail; specifically for **Survey** an unbiased interest in government policies and the British view of overseas affairs.

As with all government publications—and there are good reasons for it—precedents and rules must be followed, but for the indexer they are a help and not a hindrance if there is a willingness to accept that one enjoys rather less overall control—though the present writer never found suggested changes unwelcome.

**Philip Found is a Civil Servant (retired).**

Opposite is shown a page from the **Survey of Current Affairs Index January–December 1985**. The first entry is under the main heading **Defence**, following air defence, 180, 181.