

Prime Minister

a. M. Lyman



This is much better - publication on budget day or the day after.

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PRIME MINISTER

The timing of the Defence ~~budget~~ debate (see Flag A) can be decided between Mr Pym and the Leader of the House. Content?

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE WHITE PAPER

Your Private Secretary's letter of 20 February contained your suggestion that the White Paper might be published with the Budget.

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27/12*

2. In the light of your comment I have looked at this again. There are some problems about publishing the White Paper with the Budget - the inconsistencies between the figures, which will be difficult to explain to those not familiar with the long lead-time in preparing the White Paper and may stimulate suspicions that the Government have chosen the assumptions in the White Paper which put the expenditure figures in the most favourable light, and consequences for other announcements including the difficulty about the Defence Estimates mentioned in the letter of 20 February from Francis Pym's Private Secretary.

over taken by letter at Flag A

3. But there are advantages, as you say, in avoiding a major statement on public expenditure just before the Budget and in presenting our immediate and medium-term expenditure plans in the general context of our economic and fiscal strategy. On reflection I am inclined to share your view that the balance of advantage is in favour of publishing the expenditure decisions with the Budget; and so, I see, are Patrick Jenkin and Norman St. John-Stevas. If any colleague sees decisive objection to delaying publication, I should be grateful if they would let me know urgently.



4. There will be a problem about helping the press to absorb the White Paper as well as all the other material issued with the Budget, especially since bringing the main decisions into the Budget will make it too risky to distribute to the press the usual Confidential Final Revises of the White Paper before Budget Day. One way of dealing with this, which I am still considering, may be to announce the main expenditure decisions in the Budget but to defer publication of the White Paper itself until the following day. This would make it possible to issue Confidential Final Revises on Budget Day and to hold press briefings on the following day, and would mean that the press did not have to report the details of the White Paper until a day after the main Budget material.

5. I am copying this minute to other members of the Cabinet and Sir Robert Armstrong.

(G.H.)

26 February 1980

This would make it very difficult for the Opposition who have to open the debate the next day. They would have no time to check the figures before the debate. I should do the job the same day.



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COMMISSIONER

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