

Parliament

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref. A09762

PRIME MINISTER

Legislative Programme 1979-80

(C(79) 17 and 18)

BACKGROUND

The Home Secretary in his paper (C(79) 17) on behalf of The Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation Committee, recommends the introduction of 43 main Bills (Annex A) and foresees the need for some "Contingent" Bills (say five out of a list of 16) (Annex B). In addition there could be ten Scottish Bills (Annex C); and up to nine lower priority Bills provided they are accepted for Second Reading Committee. A programme of fewer than 70 Bills (out of 102 originally submitted by Ministers) is not excessive in a long Session, but perhaps as many as 15 will be markedly controversial and probably six (not identified) will require to be guillotined. Details of the Bills are given in the separate paper C(79) 18.

2. In selecting Bills, the Committee have sought a balanced programme reflecting the Government's main political objectives (paragraph 1 of C(79) 17). All The Queen's Speech Bills have found a place. Otherwise QL have been guided, with few exceptions, by the priorities of Departmental Ministers. Among the exceptions are the Road Safety (Drink and Driving) Bill which QL decided was not urgent and would most likely prove to be controversial, and the Rate Support Grant (Wales) Bill, which you asked to be rejected.

3. One or two Ministers may seek to add to the Programme. In particular, the Secretary of State for Industry may press the claims of the Telecommunications Authority Bill, which would split the Post Office into two Corporations dealing with posts and telecommunications respectively. He will have an Aircraft and Shipbuilding (Denationalisation) Bill (No. 35) and an Industry Bill (No. 36), but probably not a separate Cable and Wireless Bill (No. 37) if provision can be made elsewhere. The Secretary of State for Trade, who will have five Bills (Nos. 12, 13, 14, 41 and 42) may seek one further Bill (e.g. Consumer Credit, Civil Aviation, Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences)).

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4. The question of a single Bill for the Disposal of Assets is shortly to be considered in the Disposal of Public Assets Sub-Committee, E(DL). I do not know whether it would wholly supplant any of the Bills listed, though it could affect the four indicated by footnote 3 in Annex A.

5. QL have sought not to overburden Parliament with legislation, to avoid late sittings and shortened Recesses. The Leaders of the two Houses and the Whips are concerned about the possibilities of delay inherent in a controversial programme; by the fact that some Bills, notably Housing and Local Government, Planning and Land, are long and complicated; and doubts whether Bills needed for early introduction will be ready by November. This is the background to the points made in paragraphs 5 and 6 of C(79) 17 and in conclusion 7(e). You will wish to bear them in mind if additional Bills are put forward in Cabinet.

HANDLING

→ 6. You might invite the Home Secretary to introduce his paper, and then see whether the Lord Chancellor, the Leaders of the two Houses or the Chief Whip wish to add anything on the feasibility of the programme.

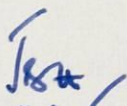
7. In discussion, you will wish to see that the Cabinet are satisfied with the likely political impact of the programme and that it meets the Government's objectives.

8. It should not be necessary to go through the list of Bills, but you will want to give Ministers an opportunity to comment on particular items.

43 CONCLUSIONS

9. In the light of discussion, you may want to guide the Cabinet to agree:
- (a) The list of Essential and Programme Bills (Annex A).
 - (b) The bringing forward of such Contingent Bills as are necessary (Annex B).
 - (c) The list of Scottish Bills (Annex C).
 - (d) The list of Bills of lower priority which prove acceptable for Second Reading Committee (Annex D);

and to endorse the importance of early policy clearance and drafting of Bills (paragraph 7(e)).


(John Hunt)