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BUSINESS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS: 23-27 JULY 1979

MINUTES of Ad Hoc Meeting held in
Conference Room E, Cabinet Office
on MONDAY, 16 JULY 1979 at 12.30 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Norman St John-Stevas MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
(In the Chair)

The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP
Secretary of State for Industry

The Rt Hon Michael Jopling MP
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

Mr Hugh Rossi MP
Minister of State
Northern Ireland Office

The Rt Hon Sally Oppenheim MP
Minister of State
Department of Trade

Mr Alexander Fletcher MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State, Scottish Office

Mr John Stradling Thomas MP
Treasurer of the Household
Treasury

SECRETARIAT

Mr D E R Faulkner
Mr J M Lyon

SUBJECT

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THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER said that the Cabinet had agreed (CC(79) 9th Conclusions, Minute 2) that the Second Reading of the Competition Bill should take place before the Summer Recess. It would therefore be necessary to find time for this debate in the week beginning 23 July. Full-day debates had already been planned for that week on a number of Northern Ireland orders, including the Appropriation (No 2) Order; Southern Africa; regional policy; the Consolidated Fund Bill; and the summer adjournment. The programme would have to be re-arranged to make room for the Competition Bill, either by reducing the length of time allotted to one of the planned debates, or by deferring one of them until after the Recess.

In discussion it was noted that the Government were already committed to a full day's debate on Southern Africa, and the debates on the Consolidated Fund and the summer adjournment would each last a full day. It was agreed that the Second Reading of the Competition Bill would require a full day's debate. A debate on regional policy was also essential to remove uncertainty among investors at home and abroad and to forestall accusations that the Government were acting without Parliamentary authority: a full day would again be required. It would not be appropriate to make an announcement about the Scottish aspects of changes in regional policy in Scottish Grand Committee before the main announcement had been made on the Floor of the House. Strong criticism could be expected from Northern Ireland Members if the debate on the Northern Ireland Orders did not take place until after 10.00 pm. They intended to use consideration of the Appropriation (No. 2) Order as the occasion for a major debate on housing policy in the light of the Rowland Report into the contracts awarded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. This was a sensitive issue, and even a debate starting at 7.00 pm would be considered insufficient. If adequate time were not made available before the Recess, the Government would be accused of indifference and evasion. A promise of a full day's debate after the Recess would not be considered an adequate alternative.

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THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Meeting recognised the strong objections to restricting the time available for the Northern Ireland debate. No other practicable alternative seemed, however, to be available, and the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, should consider whether the Northern Ireland Orders might be taken after 10.00 pm on 23 July, with a further debate after 10.00 pm on 24 July, on the understanding that a full debate on Northern Ireland matters could if necessary be arranged as soon as possible after the Recess. The Second Reading of the Competition Bill could then be debated until 10.00 pm on 23 July; the debate on regional policy could be held until 10.00 pm on 24 July; all stages of the Consolidated Fund Bill could be taken on 25 July (preceded by the debate on the adjournment of the House); the debate on Southern Africa would be held on 26 July; and the summer adjournment debates would take place on 27 July.

The Meeting -

1. Took note, with approval, of the summing up of their discussion by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
2. Invited the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, to consider further the points made in discussion, in consultation as necessary with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Chief Whip.
3. Invited the Chief Whip to make appropriate arrangements for the business in the week beginning 23 July 1979.