

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Affairs

*Prime Minister - Parliament
of Cabinet decided finally on 20th
November tomorrow, I am sure that
the new date should be announced
as soon as The Queen has been
told (She has already been warned
but the change is likely). This may
take a few hours, depending
on the details of her programme in Italy.*

You may wish the Cabinet to be told the present state of business in the House of Lords and invited to endorse the postponement of the State Opening from 13th November to 20th November. (Since the House of Commons does not resume until Monday, 27th October, there is no need to ask the Chancellor of the Duchy to tell the Cabinet about forthcoming business in the Commons until next week's Cabinet.)

*13th
15th*

BACKGROUND

2. The State Opening of the 1980-81 Session of Parliament had been arranged for Thursday, 13th November, with Prorogation of the current Session on Monday, 10th or Tuesday, 11th November. These dates were, however, dependent on three major Bills - Broadcasting, Civil Aviation and, in particular, the Local Government Bill - completing their passage through the Lords by Monday, 3rd November to allow time for Commons' consideration of Lords' amendments before Prorogation. The Lord President reported to you earlier in the week his doubts whether the Local Government, Planning and Land (No. 2) Bill could be got through the House of Lords in time. In the event, the Lords' Committee Stage of the Bill was not completed on Tuesday evening, though it is hoped to complete it today, Wednesday, and it has become almost inevitable that the State Opening will have to be postponed. Your own visit to Germany and The Queen's commitments in connection with the State Visit of the King of Nepal mean that Thursday, 20th November is the earliest practicable alternative date. Your Office have already asked the Palace to reserve that date.

HANDLING

3. You may wish to ask the Lord President for an up-to-date statement of the progress of the three Bills in the Lords. The Government secured satisfactory majorities in discussion of the block grant provisions of the Local Government Bill - and the Cabinet may wish to record their appreciation of the work of the Lords' business managers - but were narrowly defeated on two amendments to a clause on new towns. How serious were these defeats and can

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they be reversed at the next stage? The Secretary of State for the Environment may wish to comment. Is the Lord President satisfied that the Government can now secure the passage of the three Bills without major problems? The Chancellor of the Duchy and the Chief Whip may want to comment on the likely response of the Commons to the Lords' amendments. If postponement of the State Opening gives a few more days' leeway, is it likely that there will have to be a guillotine on the Local Government Bill?

4. As regards the State Opening, the Lord President, supported if necessary by the Chief Whip, can explain why it has to be postponed. That being so, there seems every advantage in announcing the decision as soon as possible: invitations for 13th November have already gone out. The Cabinet may be content to leave the exact timing to the Lord President's judgment of the tactical situation in dealing with the Opposition in the House of Lords. It is, of course, essential that The Queen should be told before any announcement is made.

5. Finally, you may wish to ask the Chancellor of the Duchy to report to next week's Cabinet on the likely implications of postponement for Commons business, both before Prorogation and for the legislative programme of the next Session.

CONCLUSION

6. Subject to any points made in discussion, the Cabinet might note the present position in the House of Lords, endorse the decision to postpone the State Opening until 20th November, and invite the Lord President to arrange for that postponement to be announced as early as possible by way of a statement in the House of Lords.



(Robert Armstrong)

15th October 1980