

S E C R E T



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

Prime Minister

Legislative Programme
Contempt of Court Bill

In his minute to you of 19th February, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asked whether I would consider going no further with the Contempt of Court Bill this Session than introduction and Second Reading in the Lords.

I am strongly opposed to this suggestion. The Government is committed to proceeding with this Bill by virtue not only of the explicit promise in the Queen's Speech, but also of our international obligation under the European Human Rights Convention as declared by the Court of Human Rights in the Sunday Times case in April 1979. Moreover, the Bill is eagerly awaited in certain quarters both in Parliament and outside, notably among the press and broadcasters. They would certainly not take the view that the course proposed would be an adequate implementation of the Government's commitment and they would be quick to lay the same charge of procrastination against us as they regularly and justifiably laid against the previous Administration.

The Contempt of Court Bill is my only important Bill this Session. It is only because of the shortage of drafting resources in the Summer and early Autumn that it is not by now well on its way through Parliament. It is not a long Bill (about 22 clauses and four short schedules) and its main objectives will not be opposed by anyone. Indeed, I think it will be welcomed in both Houses. Although it may arouse some interest and debate at Second Reading in each House, I doubt if the remaining stages will be very time-consuming.

I fully recognise the difficulties which the Chancellor of the Duchy and the Chief Whips in both Houses have to meet. But I think that the Government has little to lose and much credit to gain by pressing ahead with the Contempt Bill as originally planned. I personally would be in some difficulty, which I think would reflect on the Government as a whole, if we were to renege on our plan to do so.

I am copying this to the recipients of the Chancellor of the Duchy's minute.

H. of S. M.
20 FEB 80.

22 FEB 1950

