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Ref. A0449

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Affairs: Legislative Programme 1979-80

BACKGROUND

You asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to outline the present state of the legislative programme at Cabinet tomorrow. The Chancellor of the Duchy has set out the most recent position in his minute of 16th October, copied to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Lord President and the Chief Whip but not to other members of the Cabinet.

HANDLING

2. You will want the Chancellor of the Duchy to give his oral report. He is likely to summarise the information on particular Bills which he gave you in his minute, and to make three general points -
 - (i) Some Bills are later than were originally planned (e.g. Housing; Local Government, Planning and Land; Transport; and to a lesser extent Education and Protection of Official Information), but there is no question at this stage of having to drop any bills from the programme for lack of Parliamentary time.
 - (ii) There will, however, be difficulty in meeting the deadlines for some of those Bills which need early Royal Assent - e.g. Industry, Education, Transport, Aerospace, Shipbuilding, Coal Industry. Priority will be given to the Industry Bill and to others which are important for the Chancellor's Budget strategy.
 - (iii) Every effort must be made to prevent any further slippage, which could affect not only the timetable for the Bill concerned but also of the programme as a whole. Business will already be congested at certain periods in both Houses: any slippage will make the congestion worse.
3. You might ask the Chief Whip to add any further points, and then give the Lord Chancellor an opportunity to comment as Chairman of the Legislation Committee. He is likely to reinforce (iii) above and to argue that Departments

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must ensure that policy issues are resolved in good time before a Bill is due to be taken at L Committee and introduced in Parliament. He will have particularly in mind the Protection of Official Information Bill, which the Home Secretary withdrew from consideration at L Committee earlier this week because of an unresolved disagreement with the Treasury and other Departments about the treatment of nationalised industries. This disagreement may be settled this afternoon, but if not you will want to resist any suggestion that it should be resolved at Cabinet without notice to the Ministers concerned. If the Home Secretary cannot reach agreement in bilateral discussion with other Ministers, he will bring the matter to the Home and Social Affairs Committee next week. He will in any event want the Bill to be introduced as soon as possible, since it is urgently needed to provide business in the House of Lords.

4. You might next invite comments from the Lord President from the point of view of the House of Lords.

5. You will not want any subsequent discussion to be prolonged, but you will want to satisfy yourself that good progress is being made with those Bills to which the Government are most strongly committed - especially perhaps Education, Housing and Trades Unions.

6. Paragraph 5 of the Chancellor of the Duchy's minute deals with guillotine motions. It is probably best to leave the matter to be considered between the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Chief Whip and the Minister sponsoring the Bill when the time comes. (It seems likely, however, that the Industry Bill will need to be guillotined before Christmas if it is to reach Royal Assent by the end of March.) Other points on the handling of particular Bills should also be left for separate discussion with the Chancellor of the Duchy wherever possible.

CONCLUSIONS

7. You need not seek any specific decisions at this stage but, subject to the discussion, the Cabinet might endorse the need for:

- (i) priority to be given to those Bills which require early Royal Assent in order to achieve early financial benefits i.e. Industry, Education, Transport, Aerospace.

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- (ii) Further slippage to be avoided; and
- (iii) policy differences to be resolved in good time before the Bill is due at Legislation Committee.

Otherwise the handling of particular Bills might be left to the Chancellor of the Duchy, the Lord President and the two Chief Whips, in consultation with the sponsoring Ministers and reporting to yourself and to colleagues in Cabinet in good time if serious difficulty seems likely to occur.

John Hunt

(John Hunt)

17th October, 1979