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PRIME MINISTERLegislative Programme 1982-83
(C(82) 10 and 11)

BACKGROUND

The Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation Committee (QL) have now completed their consideration of the 80 proposals put forward by Departments for Bills for next Session's Legislative Programme. QL's recommendations are summarised in the Annexes to the Home Secretary's main memorandum (C(82) 10), and further details are given in this supplementary note (C(82) 11). The Committee worked on the basis that the Programme should be capable of being completed comfortably by the Summer Recess of 1983 (so as to leave open the option of a General Election in the autumn of that year); should further the Government's main strategic objectives while at the same time having a substantial social content; should contain only those Bills which could confidently be expected to be ready by the beginning of the Session, or, exceptionally, by the end of November at the latest; and should include a good stock of Bills suitable for Lords introduction. Against this background, QL propose that there should be a main programme of 17 Bills, together with 3 Scottish Bills (all suitable for Second Reading in Scottish Grand Committee), and 10 Bills to be brought forward only if they are ready by the beginning of the Session and then prove acceptable to the Opposition for taking under the Second Reading Committee procedure. The Committee have noted that up to 6 further Bills might become essential in certain circumstances, and that there is a possibility of additional legislation being proposed on rating reform and public transport finance. As in previous years, QL have not included Finance and Consolidation Bills in their reckoning.

2. You discussed the general approach to next Session's programme with the Home Secretary, the Leaders of both Houses, and the Chief Whip on 11th March.

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HANDLING

3. You will want the Home Secretary to introduce his two memoranda. The Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip may then wish to give their assessment of the various factors affecting the management of the programme next Session. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General may like to comment on the importance for opinion among Government supporters outside Parliament of this last full Session's legislative programme before the Election.

4. Before looking at individual Bills, you may wish the Cabinet to consider the overall size and balance of the proposed programme. Do they agree that 17 Bills is about right for the main programme? If so, it follows that there is little or no scope for net additions to it. Does it strike the right balance between carrying forward the Government's main strategies, and avoiding a degree of controversy which would put unacceptable demands on Government supporters in both Houses and consequently jeopardise its successful completion by the end of July 1983?

5. It may not be practicable or necessary to bring forward some of the measures recommended by QL. The Secretary of State for Energy can say whether subordinate legislation under the Health and Safety at Work Act might (as has been suggested) be substituted for the Gas Safety Bill, as a necessary preliminary to the disposal of the gas appliance retailing interests of the British Gas Corporation. The Home Secretary can assess the prospects for data protection legislation next Session in the light of the initial reactions to the White Paper. The Secretary of State for Education and Science is still in consultation with the Chief Secretary, on the financial implications of certain disputed provisions of the proposed Further Education Bill. Conversely, the Secretary of State for the Environment can assess the likelihood of primary legislation being required on rates. A memorandum by the Secretary of State for Transport, recommending legislation next Session on London Transport finance, is to be considered by E Committee immediately after Cabinet.

Hostile
Press
Reaction

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6. You may next wish to invite any comments on omissions from the proposed programme. The items most likely to be pressed are -

(a) Water.

QL agreed that legislation to raise the borrowing limits of the water authorities was essential, but did not feel that the inclusion of the wider (and highly controversial) proposals on the reorganisation of the water industry should be given preference over the other competing claims for legislative time next Session. The Secretary of State for the Environment has argued that there is a clear commitment to legislation in this area, that his proposals would be an important step forward in promoting efficiency and competitiveness in the public sector, and that they would reduce the number of quangos.

(b) Royal Ordnance Factories.

E(DL) recognised on 18th March that progress could be made on the reorganisation of the ROFs without legislation, but the Secretary of State for Defence argues that early legislation to create a Companies Act company for the Factories would be a valuable stimulus, particularly in securing a new top management with a more commercial approach.

(c) Social Science Research Council (SSRC) (Abolition).

The Secretary of State for Education and Science may argue that space should be left for a Bill to abolish or reform the SSRC if Lord Rothschild so recommends. It is not yet clear when the report of the Rothschild Inquiry will be published, or whether it will propose changes requiring primary legislation; I gather that Lord Rothschild is not likely to propose abolition. QL thought that consultations on the report could not possibly be completed in time for legislation to be ready early enough in the Session.

(d) Student Loans.

QL considered that a Bill providing for loans to students as an alternative to grants would add excessively to the controversy surrounding an already contentious proposed programme; they also noted that no

*See the Chancellor's
minute below.
The Policy Unit
strongly support
his view.*

MAD

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policy agreement had yet been reached on this subject. The Secretary of State for Education and Science has asked that "the possibility of legislating may be kept alive".

← (e) Health and Social Services (Miscellaneous Provisions).

The Social Services Secretary, with the support of the Secretary of State for Employment, is likely to argue that this Bill should include provisions to withdraw entitlement to supplementary benefit from 16 year olds, and to abolish the child dependency additions to short-term benefits. He will say that the former measure, which was announced in the White Paper "A New Training Initiative", is an integral part of the new youth training scheme, and that both measures are designed to produce public expenditure savings which have been taken into account in the Public Expenditure White Paper. QL feared that the addition of these provisions would convert an unexceptionable piece of social legislation, much of which is likely to command all-Party support, into a contentious Bill which would no longer be suitable for Lords introduction. If the Cabinet decide that legislation on benefits next Session is essential, it is for consideration whether a short separate Bill would be preferable. There would then be no risk of damaging the presentational impact of the Health and Social Services (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill; and it is desirable to keep this Bill in a form in which it can be introduced in the Lords.

(f) Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) (Scotland).

QL decided not to recommend inclusion of this Bill in the programme, on the grounds that it would lead to pressure, which the Minister of Agriculture and other Ministers are most anxious to avoid, for legislation on agricultural tenure in England and Wales. The Secretary of State for Scotland puts the Bill second in his order of priorities for next Session, doubts whether it would have repercussions of the kind feared by QL, and argues that there should be room for it, since the 3 Scottish Bills recommended by QL are relatively short compared with this Session's Civic Government (Scotland) and Local

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Government and Planning (Scotland) Bills. (If the Cabinet decide not to include the Agricultural Holdings Bill, and the Secretary of State for Scotland considers the Scottish programme too light, he might wish to add instead a short Police (Scotland) Bill, which he suggested in his original recommendations to QL.)

7. Finally, the Cabinet might approve the list of Second Reading Committee Bills in Annex C of C(82) 10. The Secretary of State for Trade may press for the Civil Aviation (Eurocontrol) (Amendment) Bill and the Registration of Yachts Bill to be introduced whether or not the Opposition agree to their being taken under the Second Reading Committee procedure. If he does, a compromise might be to introduce them in the Lords without preliminary soundings being taken of the Opposition, and for the business managers to use their best endeavours to get them through the Commons even if the Second Reading Committee procedure cannot be used.

CONCLUSIONS

8. Subject to any points made in discussion, you will wish to guide the Cabinet:-

- (a) to approve the recommended Legislative Programme for 1982-83 as set out in the Annexes to C(82) 10, with or without modification;
- (b) to invite all Ministers concerned to take careful note of the points made on the timetable for the preparation of legislation in paragraph 7 of C(82) 10, and to inform the Lord President immediately of any difficulties.

RIA

Robert Armstrong

21st April 1982

Prime Minister

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-233 3000

PRIME MINISTER

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME 1982-83

I have seen the Home Secretary's memorandum C(82)10, which we are to discuss in Cabinet on Thursday (22 April).

2. QL Committee has agreed that we must have a Water Bill in the next Session, but has concluded that it should be confined to raising the borrowing limits of the water authorities. I had hoped that it would be possible to find time for a wider Bill, as proposed by the Secretary of State for the Environment; and I hope that we can consider this further in Cabinet.

3. As you know, I attach particular importance to abolishing the National Water Council. Colleagues will remember that the council has been appallingly inept in managing pay settlements for the water workers. It has long been our intention to legislate the NWC out of existence. I think the time has come to will the means as well as the end.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to the other members of the Cabinet, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G.H.'.

(G.H.)

20 April 1982

MR. HOSKYNS

cc Mr. Pattison
Mr. Scholar

1982/83 Legislative Programme

You will wish to see the two attached Cabinet papers on the 1982/83 legislative programme.

Arising from the Bills recommended for inclusion in the main programme (Annex A of C(82)10) we have a particular interest in two issues:

i) As at present intended, the Water Bill will be confined to a very short Bill to increase the borrowing limits of the water authorities. Ministers have agreed in correspondence not to expand it, and make it more controversial, by including provision for the abolition of the National Water Council. But those of us who have dealt for the last two years with pay bargaining in the water industry have become convinced that nothing short of abolition of the NWC will lead to a significant shift in the balance of bargaining power from the unions to the employer. The Prime Minister shares this view, and at an earlier stage it was decided to draft the legislation: but the provision has been squeezed out of the programme for lack of space. Were an opportunity to arise to reinstate it, we should certainly wish to do so.

ii) A Telecommunications Bill is included, for the privatisation of BT. I have minuted extensively on the discussions in TP(O) about this policy, which will be coming to Ministers in E(TP) on 22 April. As you know, the arguments for the privatisation of British Telecom are by no means overwhelming, even though I think the case is probably made. If Ministers decide to exclude this Bill, which (despite the anodyne description in C(82)11) will certainly be highly controversial, there might perhaps be room for the abolition of the National Water Council.

/Mr. Pattison

- 2 -

Mr. Pattison may care to note these points, with which I think he is already quite familiar.

J. M. M. VEREKER

14 April 1982

PRIME MINISTER

MW

You may like to glance through the attached minutes of this week's QL (QL(82) 2nd) discussion.

The issues which took most time in your meeting on legislation are covered as follows:

Water Bill: Right to Buy for
Leasehold Tenants: page 4.

Gas Safety Bill: Data Protection
Bill: page 7.

There is to be another QL discussion on Tuesday, and thereafter the Home Secretary expects to be ready to put a paper to Cabinet. It is possible that he may want to consult you again before the paper for Cabinet is finalised.

M.A.P.

26 March 1982

Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill (Allocation of Time)

3.40 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Francis Pym): I beg to move, That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:

Committee

1. — (1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before the 23rd March 1982.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 23 March may continue until Eleven p.m., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 24th March 1982.

Report and Third Reading

2. — (1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Seven o'clock on the second of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 43 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House their Resolutions as to the proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than the fourth day on which the House sits after the day on which the Chairman of the Standing Committee reports the Bill to the House.

(3) The resolutions in any Report made under Standing Order No. 43 may be varied by a further Report so made, whether or not within the time specified in sub-paragraph (2) above, and whether or not the Resolutions have been agreed to by the House.

(4) The Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in the order in which proceedings on Consideration of the Bill are taken.

Procedure in Standing Committee

3. — (1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be moved in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

4. No Motion shall be moved to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and New Schedules are to be taken in the Standing Committee but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

5. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be moved in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on first allotted days

7. — (1) On the first allotted day paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for two hours after Ten o'clock.

(2) Any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 9 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the said period of two hours.

(3) If the first allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 stands

over from an earlier day, a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings upon that Motion shall be added to the said period of two hours.

Private business

8. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

9. — (1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others), that is to say—

- (a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;
- (b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);
- (c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment or Motion is moved by a Member of the Government;
- (d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so moved for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

- (a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;
- (b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

10. — (1) The proceedings on any Motion moved in the House by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion moved at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

11. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

[Mr. Francis Pym]

- (a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution, or
- (b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Re-committal

12. — (1) References in this Order to proceedings on Consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings, at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of re-committal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to re-commit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

13. In this Order—

“allotted day” means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day or is set down for consideration on that day;

“the Bill” means the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill;

“Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee” means a Resolution of the business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

“Resolution of the Business Committee” means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

Timetable motions are never welcome to the House, but, unfortunately, they are sometimes necessary. I admit that it is with some regret, and only after the most careful consideration, that the Government feel obliged to table this motion, although I am sure that it comes as no surprise to Labour Members, particularly those who are members of Standing Committee E.

Naturally we had hoped to secure the passage of the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill without such a motion, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State made our attitude clear during the Second Reading debate when he said:

“Provided that we make reasonable progress, the last thing that the Government want is a guillotine”—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1982; Vol. 16, c. 240.]

Hon. Members will interpret “reasonable progress” differently, but in the Government’s view, progress has been slow—to the extent that if we did not take action the passage of the Bill through both Houses could be put in jeopardy.

Throughout the proceedings of the Bill so far the Opposition have made their objections to it very clear and they have used every legitimate means, as is their right, to seek to frustrate its passage. We were never in doubt about the degree of opposition that the Bill would receive from the Labour Party.

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): Is it not strange, in the light of the vehement opposition of which he is speaking, that only one Opposition Back Bencher is present?

Mr. Pym: That may be so.

The debate in Committee on the sittings motion lasted nearly three hours. That was perhaps an indicative beginning. Clause 1 occupied eight sittings and over 25 hours of debate, during which time only eight groups of amendments were considered. Clause 2 occupied three sittings and 14 hours of debate, which were spent on six

groups of amendments. The Committee then moved to four sittings a week from 16 February, but even that did not have a commensurate impact on the pace of progress.

I shall not go through the full details of the time that was spent on clauses. One debate on one amendment, which the Committee must have found enjoyable, took nearly six hours, and the discussion ranged from Tudor history, through the rival merits of hill and valley sheep, to the film career of President Reagan. No doubt it was very enjoyable stuff, but it did not enable the Committee to make much progress.

Mr. Edward Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil): That was not out of order.

Mr. Pym: Of course it was not out of order. I never suggested that it was. I said that it was very enjoyable, but that it was not very helpful to progress.

By the end of last Thursday’s sitting—the seventeenth sitting—after nearly 70 hours of debate, the Committee had dealt with only 11 clauses. Twenty-five clauses and four schedules remain to be considered. It was against that background that the Government reluctantly concluded that a guillotine was needed.

Dr. J. Dickson Mabon (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Leader of the House has forgotten to tell us one thing in this chapter of the story. One fundamental piece of information is defective. I am referring to the absence of the articles of association, without which it was not possible to make progress on the first eight clauses.

Mr. Pym: I shall come to that matter during my remarks. The right hon. Gentleman has raised an important issue.

The Bill raises many issues that are important to the gas and oil industries, including those affecting the safety of North Sea operations. We are anxious that all the Bill’s provisions are adequately discussed, but at the present rate of progress the Bill could still be in Committee as we approach the Summer Recess. Clearly that is not acceptable. It is, of course, the right and responsibility of the Opposition to oppose measures in which they do not believe, but it is also right and proper for the Government to promote their legislative programme and to see their measures on to the statute book within a reasonable time.

The purpose of this motion is to ensure that the passage of the Bill can be expedited with all the remaining issues sensibly debated. The motion provides for 10 further sittings which, if approved by the House, means that the Committee will have had over 110 hours in which to debate the Bill. We believe that to be a reasonable allocation of time. The motion instructs the Standing Committee to report the Bill to the House by 23 March and provides that if the Committee is sitting on that day, after the House has adjourned, it should report the Bill on 24 March.

Under paragraph 3 of the motion it will be for the Business Sub-Committee to determine the number of sittings between now and the time fixed for Report. The Government hope that the present four sittings a week will be retained until that time, when the motion will lead us to complete the Committee stage after the afternoon sitting. As I say, it is for the Business Sub-Committee to decide. The motion will enable another 10 sittings to take place before Report, to deal with the remaining clauses and schedules. As is usual on these occasions, it is left to

the Business Sub-Committee to determine the compartments into which the Bill should be divided and the times at which debate should close.

Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading have been allocated a day and a half, with consideration on the first day coming to a conclusion at midnight. The Business Sub-Committee will be able to decide how the time on Report is to be apportioned. I am sure that in deciding the allocation of time it will take account of the desire of hon. Members on both sides to have enough time to deal with the safety provisions in part IV.

Throughout the proceedings of the Committee, Ministers have done everything that they can to be as helpful as possible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made available a commentary on clauses. He has arranged for briefing on many aspects to be provided to the Committee by BNOC and the BGC. It is proposed to circulate notes on safety matters to hon. Members on both sides.

I know the importance of the matter that was raised by the right hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Mabon) about the articles of association. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has told the Committee that he plans to make the articles available in draft, together with the memorandum of association, by the end of this week. I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate the trouble that my right hon. Friend has taken to bring this material forward, given the complex technical work that is involved. There are precedents for the timing in this case and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, they are complex. The articles of association, in draft form, will be forthcoming shortly.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): The fact that the articles are now to be made available does not affect the argument that the debates would have been shortened if those articles had been available as from clause 1. The fact remains that we shall not have an opportunity, except for a short period on Report, to debate the implications of the articles of association.

Mr. Pym: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to hold that view, but, to say the least, it is challengeable to say that time would have been saved. We do not accept that the work of the Committee has been held up because the articles were not available before. My right hon. Friend made clear the Government's policy on safeguards against changes in control in his speech in Second Reading.

More generally, Ministers have dealt fully with the many questions and points raised in Committee. I note, in particular, from the *Official Report* that on one occasion the Minister of State answered each of 16 questions asked by the hon. Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell). In this and in other respects they have done their best to assist hon. Members in their understanding of the various provisions and to answer their questions in that connection. They have also made every effort to accommodate the wishes of Opposition Members in the proceedings of the Committee. My hon. Friend the Minister of State offered to take part IV out of sequence, in order to meet the wishes of the right hon. Member for Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). Ultimately, the right hon. Gentleman decided not to take up that offer, and that is fair enough. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State withdrew a Government proposal to take schedule 1 after

clause 10—to which it relates—when Opposition Members made it clear that they were not yet ready to consider that schedule.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State arranged for the Committee to delay its sitting on 2 March until 7.30 pm, so that hon. Members could take part in a debate on gas prices. Therefore, the Government team did their best and went to every length to help the Committee's smooth running. However, at the end of the day there must be a limit to the length of time spent debating a Bill and, in the case of this Bill, that limit should now be set by means of the motion.

As I have said, however regrettable it may be, timetable motions are sometimes necessary. It may be fair to refer to a similar motion that was moved in 1975 and which referred to a similar Bill, the Petroleum and Submarine Pipe-lines Bill. That motion was moved after 60 hours in Committee. The right hon. Member for Lanark, North (Mr. Smith) then made various remarks about timetable motions and their occasional necessity. I cannot improve on those remarks.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (West Lothian): I am not insinuating that the right hon. Gentleman suggested that my 16 questions were irrelevant, but will he confirm that they were all relevant and legitimate?

Mr. Pym: I understand that they were relevant, legitimate and serious. Indeed, they received the serious answer that was called for. I have merely given one example of the way in which Ministers tried to help all Committee Members.

Mr. W. E. Garrett (Wallsend): Although it may be fair for the right hon. Gentleman to refer to the number of questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell) should he not have struck a balance and referred to the number of questions asked by the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Skeet)?

Mr. Pym: Many questions were asked, but a "bank" of 16 was unusual and, therefore, worthy of comment.

The right hon. Member for Lanark, North said in 1975: "It would not be possible for any party that has held office in this country to object to timetable motions in principle, because it would have behind it a record of its own activities when in office. That applies to my own party as well as to the Conservative Party. There is a growing conviction that to make too much fuss about a timetable is indulging in a certain amount of hypocrisy."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1975; Vol. 895, c. 162.]

I am bound to say that that is a very fair assessment. Although the motion is to be regretted, I have explained why, after the most careful consideration, the Government came to the conclusion that it was necessary to move it now, so that the Bill can reach the statute book in time and so that the remaining 25 clauses can be properly and fully debated. That is why I have moved the motion, and I ask the House to approve it.

3.53 pm

Mr. John Silkin (Deptford): In spring, the Lord President of the Council's fancy lightly turns to timetable motions. He has been remarkably consistent. Spring always comes rather early for him—on the second Monday in March. Last year, on the second Monday in March, he introduced a guillotine motion and he has done so again this year.

However, the two Bills involved are extraordinarily different. Last year's measure was the Transport Bill. The right hon. Gentleman told us that hon. Members should

[Mr. John Silkin]

not cite precedents from other timetable motions because every timetable motion referred to a different Bill and was, therefore, a separate issue. However, as the right hon. Gentleman has cited precedents today, I am entitled to refer to that Transport Bill. The Leader of the House referred to that important Bill and said that a timetable motion was needed because only one-fourteenth of the Bill had been studied. I think that five groups of amendments out of 70 have been debated. He said that, as only one-fourteenth of the Bill had been debated so late in the Session, a guillotine motion was necessary. What is the position today? Let us forget momentarily the rights and wrongs of the Bill. The Committee has reached clause 12, or has debated one-third of the Bill. There are 36 clauses and schedules, but many of the clauses still to be debated are nominal.

However, there has been an interesting development. Ten clauses have been dealt with in three weeks. Therefore, I cannot imagine why the Leader of the House should say that the Bill will not be ready until the Summer Recess. There seems to be a fault in his arithmetic. Given the present pace, the Bill will have left this House by the Whitsun Recess. Of course, no one can say what will happen to the Bill in the other place. Therefore, I do not quite understand the right hon. Gentleman's indignation. He has said that the Opposition have legitimate objections to the Bill. Of course, we have legitimate objections to any controversial Bill. However, timetable motions are applied to only a few Bills. Although we argue and fight about Bills, the Government generally get their legislation. Therefore, we seem to be dealing with a question of, as the right hon. Gentleman said, reasonable progress. For such a controversial and difficult Bill, we have not made unreasonable progress.

What are the right hon. Gentleman's arguments? He cited a rather interesting debate that seemed to go on for a long time and to touch on topics that some of us might wrongly have thought to be on the borderlines of order. The Committee Chairman did not think such debate out of order, and he is undoubtedly always right. The right hon. Gentleman said that that debate took six hours, but he is not a child and neither am I. We have both been Chief Whips and know that there is a little thing called a closure notice. Why on earth were the Government so incompetent as not to employ it? That would have shortened the argument then and there. Given that the argument ranged over so many topics, I cannot imagine that the Chair would not have accepted a closure motion three or four hours earlier. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman's argument about that debate is not very good.

The right hon. Gentleman referred—by implication—to the Government's competence, or lack of it. That did not altogether surprise us. The Bill received its Second Reading on 19 January 1982. It is one of the most important, controversial and complex Bills to be introduced this Session, yet it received its Second Reading late in the day. Of course, our debates would take time. However, the pace in Committee has not been particularly slow. [Interruption.] There must have been a bit of incompetence as well as courtesy. Most of the courtesy was extended—as the right hon. Gentleman accepted—to perfectly legitimate questions, such as those asked by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell). The Government gave most of the answers courteously

and at some length. If anybody was taking the time, it sounds to me as though it was the Government Front Bench—

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Nigel Lawson): The right hon. Gentleman was not there.

Mr. Silkin: Of course, I was not there. The Secretary of State, who was not there, must know that the Leader of the House was not there either. The Leader of the House and I can only judge by reading the *Official Report* of the proceedings of the various Committees and by talking to our colleagues. If the Secretary of State for Energy believes that every Leader of the House and every Shadow Leader of the House is present at every single Committee sitting, he knows very little about the workings of the House. Of course we were not there.

Mr. Peter Rost (Derbyshire, South-East): The right hon. Gentleman obviously did not take part in the proceedings as I did, otherwise he would not try to mislead the House about the length of time taken by the Conservative Front Bench, or, indeed, by Conservative members of the Committee. If the right hon. Gentleman had attended that Committee, he would have been thoroughly bored and frustrated by the tedious repetition and length of contributions from some Labour Members on that Committee—I am not referring to the right hon. Member for Leeds, South (Mr. Rees)—and he would not have made such remarks to the House.

Mr. Silkin: I hold the view that interventions should be short to be effective. The longer they are, the less effective they are. I was not talking about Government Back Benchers. The poor devils are always in the difficulty that they must keep quiet because the Whips want the Bill to go through. I know, because I have been a Chief Whip. The Government want their legislation, so the Conservative Back Benchers are bored and frustrated, particularly when all the good points are being made by Labour Members. What does one expect?

From what the Leader of the House said, it would appear that the detail with which the Government Front Bench dealt courteously with the Opposition's points inevitably took a great deal of time. That is all that I was saying; I was agreeing with the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Rother Valley): The point that my right hon. Friend makes about the Conservative Back Benchers is accurate, except in one respect. The hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Skeet) was responsible for one of the longest speeches in Committee, on an amendment that occupied a considerable amount of the Committee's time.

Mr. Silkin: My natural courtesy prevented me from pointing that out.

The Government will get this timetable motion. Governments always do. We know that. However, what is its real effect? It is that we shall not have fully debated part II before the guillotine falls. The Committee has reached clause 12 and there are a further four or five important clauses to be dealt with. The Leader of the House made an astonishing remark concerning the articles of association of Britoil. He said that they will be available at the end of the week. That is only two weeks after the whole of the first part, dealing with oil, has been dealt with and disposed of ruthlessly by the Government. That is

absolute nonsense. How can one possibly deal with that in Committee when the clauses in question have already gone past?

Dr. J. Dickson Mabon: If the motion goes through—and I hope that it does not—we shall have had 27 sittings, during only six of which will the Committee have seen the articles of association.

Mr. Silkin: I did say that there was a considerable amount of incompetence on the Conservative Benches. There is no doubt that that is true. The right hon. Gentleman is merely reaffirming the case. The Leader of the House rather slurred over the question of safety with regard to offshore activities. I think that he felt a little difficulty in putting the point across. That matter was dealt with on Second Reading by the Secretary of State in four throw-away words. All those matters would be destroyed by a timetable motion. Proper discussion would disappear.

Why do the Government want to rush the Bill through? There is no shortage of legislative time. This is the Session of all Sessions when the Leader of the House has shown more competence and ability with regard to the allocation of time than I have ever seen. He knows that I believe that. I have always paid tribute to his ability to do it. He has managed for the first time to cut the amount of time spent on legislation, so that we can spend a little more time on other matters. Such legislative time as there is should be made available for the most important, the most party controversial legislation.

Can anyone imagine anything more controversial than the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill? Incidentally, it is amazing that the BNOC rip-off is being discussed at the very time when North Sea oil prices are falling and destroying the current value of the assets, which may well fall to 50 or 60 per cent. below face value. It is amazing at such a time to be told that we have to sell the assets quickly. This is the moment of all moments, that has been chosen for the destruction of our assets.

I suppose the answer is that ideology, particularly on the Government Front Bench, will always come to the fore. Privatisation is the Government's particular ideology at the moment. I suggest that there is a better word than "privatisation". The new verb for what is being done ought to be "to Amersham"—to sell off publicly owned assets at bargain basement prices, regardless of the public interest. We know how strong the Government's ideology is in this respect. We have seen it with British Telecom, Cable and Wireless, British Aerospace, and Amersham International. We know that the biggest "Amersham" of all is the Secretary of State for Energy, so that we are not surprised that this measure should be before us today.

All the parties on the Opposition Benches oppose the timetable motion. It is not just the usual procedural opposition to a timetable motion; it is an opposition based upon substance. We believe that it is an evil Bill, a bad Bill and a wicked Bill from the point of view of the nation's prospects and chances. We also believe that there has been a deliberate attempt to prevent its being properly discussed and to prevent the people from understanding what is being done in their name. I call upon my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose the timetable motion in the Lobby.

4.7 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): This is apparently a simple, straightforward procedural matter in the sense

that, whichever Government are in power, they make the same comments, and whichever party is in Opposition, it makes the same comments. On the Front Benches there are right hon. and hon. Members who have done it before and who doubtless expect to do it again. On behalf of the Back Benches, I express the hope that the system will be changed, so that it will not be done again as a matter of ritual.

In Committee we have spent 17 days signing letters, sealing envelopes, attempting to make quick telephone calls and to do some of our work as Members of Parliament, simply because we do not have a timetable motion at the beginning of the Committee stage. I hope that sooner or later some change will be made in that respect.

I am in favour of the motion today—we must have a timetable—but how sad it is to those of us who are relatively new in this place and who are still keen on seeking to assist the passage of legislation. We have enjoyed good fellowship in Committee. Some of our sittings were more like good Rotary meetings than anything else. We have been good friends on each side of the Committee, and extremely good humoured most of the time—there have been one or two excellent witticisms that we have been able to use afterwards in other places—but, alas, there has been virtually no progress, so that inevitably we have come to the need for a timetable motion, with the usual ritual speeches.

It is not easy for a relatively new Member of Parliament to speak in complete support of the Government and of the Bill while knowing that, apart from saying the ritual "Aye" and even an occasional "No", one is contributing nothing to the work of the House. I feel a deep sense of sorrow, almost of shame, that we have spent so much time and achieved so little.

I have enjoyed every moment of the Committee, and I now believe my children when they say that they can do their homework and watch television at the same time, because that is what most of us were doing, although without the television. Of course, it depended on the programme. When the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Hardy) spoke, we were riveted and all sounds of writing ceased. However, when one or two other hon. Members wished to speak, the rustling became quite remarkable.

I can see no alternative to this timetable motion. It was strange that the Opposition spokesman spent almost 12 minutes in Committee reading out the previous jobs of Government members of the Committee. As a shopkeeper, I was greatly honoured to be called, I believe, a company director. That is how we are normally referred to in court, should any of us ever reach court. Of course, most of us do not wish to reach court. My late father said that only a pauper can afford to plead not guilty and that one should avoid the courts as much as one can. That comment is, I hope, an example of the entertaining chit-chat that we have had across the Committee room. However, we must try to get the timetable motion through and, in the remaining time, try to discuss the Bill and make useful comments. I have heard many useful comments from hon. Members on both sides of the Committee, but there is no doubt that the preponderance of time was spent taking up the time. Many hon. Members on both sides of the Committee felt that we could have done slightly better than that as the time passed.

[Mr. Tony Speller]

When talking about a motion such as this, it is not unfair to say that every newer Member of the House who has served in Committee on such a major issue has similar feelings to mine. We wish only that this ritual debate had taken place a little sooner in the proceedings. The Bill is perhaps the most important one of this Parliament. It is certainly crucial to those hon. Members who are interested in energy. It is a great shame that we may discuss it more today in this Chamber than in Committee.

This system is an unacceptable waste of parliamentary time. It does us no good in the eyes and thoughts of the public who come to listen to us in Committee and who may share our good humour and friendship, but who will not admire the way in which we conduct our business. We have sat through mornings, afternoons and one extremely pleasant late evening which went through to the early hours of the morning. At the end of those sessions I knew five excellent jokes told to us by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands). I have used four of them and raised laughs, but I raised groans with the other. However, as the night wore through, I felt that I must pay attention.

There were also occasions, because of the preponderance of hon. Members from north of the border—who have some form of Thursday exeat, which those of us who come from Devonshire with a five-and-a-half-hour journey home would wish to share—when I needed simultaneous translation. That applied especially to the hon. Member for West Stirlingshire (Mr. Canavan), who is not with us now, and was not present at all the Committee sessions, because there were occasions when the exchanges across the table were such that the ordinary Sassenach was at some disadvantage.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline): Where is the ordinary Sassenach?

Mr. Speller: The minority of us from England have enjoyed ourselves tremendously and we feel that we can now take our holidays across the border with a greater sense of security.

This is a short debate, and I suspect that other hon. Members will wish to voice similar thoughts to mine, or, if they are old hands, similar thoughts to those of my right hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Deptford (Mr. Silkin). I support the motion. We must have the guillotine. I pray only that on the next long Committee on which I serve—we will consider that sometimes the great British public do not think as highly of the House as I, and may believe that we waste our time a little. Sometimes they are right.

4.15 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline): The major point of substance about the apparent delay in progress has been that admitted by the Leader of the House—the appalling lack of basic material about the articles and memorandum of association. The first part of the Bill cannot be discussed in the absence of those documents. The Secretary of State, during a Committee session last week, told us that those important documents might be made available in draft form by the end of this week. I have no idea of the exact nature and scope of the documents, but I imagine that there will be many pages and details for us to plough through. The part of the Bill to which they relate has been dealt

with, so we must return to these important aspects on Report. The Secretary of State must know in his heart of hearts that the reason for some of the delay and difficulty is the non-receipt of these important documents.

The hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) has some experience of the House, but I have a little more. Oppositions fight for time. Time is the safety valve here. If the Government deny time to the Opposition, they deny the safety valve in the democratic process. One argument of the Leader of the House is that he wishes to get the Bill through the House before the Easter Recess. I ask the right hon. Gentleman, who is an extremely intelligent and charitable gentleman: what is the haste? If world oil prices had remained stable there might have been an argument for putting this important national asset into the hands of the Secretary of State so that he could put it on the market at the end of this year, as he originally intended. That would certainly have helped the public sector borrowing requirement. That is part of the strategy of the Government. We all know that the reason for the original haste was that the Government were searching for public assets that they could flog off and therefore reduce the PSBR.

The Secretary of State is not a complete fool in such matters. We have said in Committee that he used to write the *Lex* column in the *Financial Times*. He knows that this is probably the worst possible time to put an asset such as Britoil on the market. There is instability, OPEC is having an emergency meeting and Saudi Arabia is debating whether to reduce its output of oil by more than half our production from the North Sea. Saudi Arabia argues that it will maintain oil at \$34 a barrel because it can turn the tap back. At the same time the Secretary of State congratulates BNOC because it proposes to cut the price of oil from the North Sea by \$4 a barrel and thereby use our resources to cause a reduction in world oil prices.

If the Secretary of State is right in his forecasts, I cannot see how he can argue that there is stability in the world oil market. Whoever the Government's merchant bank advisers are, they cannot argue that this is a good year to put our national assets on to the market. There is no need for haste.

There is no reason for haste in relation to the gas market. The Secretary of State said in Committee that 5 trillion cubic feet of gas are awaiting exploitation and that British Gas has been obdurate. The total reserves of gas are about 40 trillion cubic feet. There is no haste to loosen the gas market so that further exploitation and exploration can take place.

Safety is an important part of the Bill. As a palliative, the Secretary of State has said that British Gas and BNOC will submit their views on safety. I have no doubt that their views will be useful, but what about the trade unions and the people who do the job? What opportunity will they have to give evidence? That evidence should be given. It is important in the light of the recent Norwegian and Canadian experiences. We have already had a full report and a debate on safety aspects in the North Sea, but we shall not have an adequate opportunity to examine fully the safety aspects.

Safety is a non-party matter. To play party politics with safety would be shocking, but the Leader of the House is in danger of doing so, because that is what the guillotine means. He intends to drive the Bill through the Committee to satisfy some peculiar Government timetable. If there is a delay in passing the Bill, it will not necessarily be by this

House. Delay could happen in another place, because there can be no guillotine there. I am not willing to allow the Bill to be rushed through because of the Government's fears that it might be held up by excessive debate in another place.

The Leader of the House has offered no evidence of filibustering. He said that the debates had been good-natured and relevant. We had some good replies from the Minister of State, some passable replies from the Secretary of State and some middling to passable replies from the Under-Secretary of State.

We need more detailed information about the Government's policy generally and in relation to safety in particular. The safety provisions should not be at the beginning of the Bill. They should have been left out and submitted for consideration under the new Select Committee procedure. The vital safety aspects should be dealt with in a non-political way. We have had a report and massive experience in the North Sea and internationally. We need to know the views not only of BNOG and British Gas, but of the host of other participating organisations.

I deplore the timetable motion. When the Leader of the House reflects, he will realise that, in relation to safety, he is playing politics with people's lives. That should not happen.

4.26 pm

Mr. David Myles (Banff): A tremendous amount of humbug is connected with a motion such as this. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller). I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Dunfermline (Mr. Douglas). In his speech against the timetable motion I did not detect any argument against imposing a discipline so that we can debate the Bill sensibly and discuss the two sides to the arguments.

I entered the House on 3 May 1979. This is the third time that I have been a member of a Committee on a Bill that has been guillotined. It is the second time that I have taken part in a debate on a timetable motion.

The Committees on which I sat previously were different from this Committee. They were much more antagonistic and much less friendly. I give credit to the Opposition Front Bench and to all hon. Members, including even the hon. Member for West Stirlingshire (Mr. Canavan) who took up most of the time in our debates. The hon. Member uses invective, but has a smile on his face when he sits down. He knows that nobody really believes him and that nobody will take offence at what he says. It is a pity that the hon. Member, who has an almost delicious sense of humour, comes across badly in the media because when the awful things that he says appear in cold print the spirit of his remarks are lost.

Mr. W. E. Garrett: It is unfair to speak about my hon. Friend the Member for West Stirlingshire (Mr. Canavan), because he is using his invective in Cuba against President Castro. My hon. Friend is a member of the foreign affairs group.

Mr. Myles: I am grateful to the hon. Member because I was about to say that the hon. Member for West Stirlingshire is in central America, or somewhere. I am not sure what line he will be taking.

If the Committee had been conducted under the rules of the radio parlour game "Just a Minute" in which there

can be no repetition, no deviation and no hesitation, the Bill would have completed more of its Committee stage. Seriously, up to now there has not been too much serious debate in the Committee, but the Bill is important and serious. It deserves serious and balanced argument from both sides.

This is part of my objection to what has been called a ritual by my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North. Everyone knew that there would be a timetable motion. The right hon. Member for Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said in Committee that there was likely to be a guillotine. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) said that he wished that all Bills were guillotined, possibly so that the Scottish Nationalists could have a better chance of having their names printed on the front page of the Dundee *Courier and Advertiser*. He said that there should be a guillotine. I think so, too.

I admit that I was not present at the late-night sitting. I was slightly insulted when the Whip said that it had been decided that the two elder members of the Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeenshire, West (Sir R. Fairgrieve) and I—were excused on account of our age. I thought that I had far greater stamina than many of the younger members of the Committee. However, although I was slightly insulted, I did not argue, because I knew that I could read the whole debate in the record. I also knew that I need not waste my time reading the record because nearly all the debate was a time-wasting exercise.

I realise why Opposition Members take up the time of such Committees and try to delay measures of which they thoroughly disapprove. If we were in Opposition, we would try to use that weapon as well. I believe that we should find a more civilised—although the Committee is civilised—and business-like way of conducting our affairs so that we do not need to take up time in Committee and on the Floor of the House in debating a timetable motion. That seems to be a contradiction in terms.

The debate reflects the way in which the House is supposed to work in a number of other spheres. My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North and I are talking entirely as a result of what we think and not as a result of some research assistant's notes or from Whips Office notes. We are talking as practical people who became Members of Parliament recently. We are disturbed at the complicated ways in which the business of the House is carried out.

There are two types of hon. Members on both sides of the House. One is the intelligent, highly educated and sophisticated person who sees the problems of politics in a complicated way, such as the hon. Member for Dunfermline (Mr. Douglas). The hon. Gentleman left me aghast at the vast knowledge that he was always so willing to display in the debate without looking at a note. He could reel off figures and the names of the oil rigs that he had visited. I was greatly impressed, but then I thought that he was telling us only the little that he knew. He did not reveal the vast amount that he did not know, but he revealed almost all that he knew about the oil industry.

I am interested in the Bill. However, I feel a little inhibited in that one of the only things that I was able to do in Committee was to intervene on a point of order at one stage to ask whether speaking about the Hillhead by-election had anything to do with the Bill. I was a little annoyed for the simple reason that the gas comes ashore at St. Fergus in the constituency of my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Myles]

Member for Aberdeenshire, East (Mr. McQuarrie). It is not far away from Banff. On three separate occasions I have been out on oil rigs—I have visited the Forties, Ninian and Murchison fields. In the North-East of Scotland we have a close interest in energy. I felt inhibited because it was frowned upon that Conservative Members should speak in the run-up to what everyone knew would be a timetable motion.

I realise that it is cutting the ground from under our feet, but if ever we happen to land on the Opposition Benches again—as things are going that will not be likely for a long time, certainly in my parliamentary career—I shall understand the fixation of Opposition Members. However, they could make logical and sensible points that could be printed in the *Dundee Courier and Advertiser* with merit to the hon. Member for Dundee, East if that were possible.

I wholeheartedly support the timetable motion. I wish to goodness that we had had a reasonable timetable on the Bill right from the start so that we could have got down to the business in the Bill and debated it throughly, knowing that the articles of association were to come. I feel slightly guilty on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the articles of association were not available in Committee. Opposition Members have a point about that. However, there was no need to labour it time and again. There was no need to take up the Committee's time and to be so repetitive.

I support the timetable motion. I hope that the hon. Member for Dundee, East, who said that he supported timetable motions for every Bill, will also support it.

4.38 pm

Dr. J. Dickson Mabon (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Members for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) and for Banff (Mr. Myles) have argued that there is no alternative but to support the timetable motion. There is an alternative. The hon. Member for Banff hinted at it towards the end of his speech.

Mr. W. E. Garrett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not wish to intervene so early in the right hon. Gentleman's speech, but I should like to draw attention to the fact that three Scottish Members have been called and so far as I am aware not one English Member has been called.

Mr. Speller: May I say that I resent that remark?

Dr. Mabon: I do not want to interrupt this debate between the nationalities, but so far as I am aware the Lord President of the Council is an Englishman, and the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) is an Englishman, which is not bad going as the debate must finish at twenty minutes to Seven o'clock. I had better get on.

There is an alternative to the timetable motion. Every Government know that. At the commencement of the Committee stage the Government and the Opposition could have tried to agree a programme. We shall now be compelled to do so. The Bill is vital, not only because of the public aspects of safety and so on, but politically, as it is concerned with the Government's views and prejudices. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) and I are certainly not aware of a suggestion that we should have had a voluntary timetable.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Leeds, South): The Government did not approach anyone.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): It was extremely difficult to negotiate any form of timetable. The hon. Member for Devon, North mentioned a set timetable, but the basic documentation, such as the articles of association, has still not come from the Government. It was near impossible to reach an agreement between the parties on a sensible and methodical timetable without the documents.

Dr. Mabon: That confirms what I believed.

The alternative to the Opposition weapon of time is rational argument in a decent compass of time. Anyone who has held a ministerial post knows that Bills are not always perfect or as effective as one would like. They need to be discussed and changed. Even within the guillotine timetable there will be batches of Government amendments, as they will have changed their mind or been advised by their officials of defects.

The Government are merely continuing the bad habit of successive Parliaments. They are disregarding the idea of voluntary timetables and allowing, as they see it, the Opposition to waste time before bringing in a guillotine. That is a waste of rational debate. If the Government were really fair they would agree that too much time has been wasted because they did not show the Opposition the articles of association and give them help to understand the Bill so as to agree a voluntary timetable.

The Government, of course, in that case would not get the Bill by Easter. It is farcial to believe that we can rationally debate the remaining clauses in 10 sittings. I have seen many timetable motions in my 25 years in Parliament. This is one of the cruellest that I have witnessed. Both sides play a bad game with timetable motions. Here, for example, on Report and Third Reading we are limited to two days. Hon. Members on the Government Benches cannot reasonably support the motion.

We have had two good-natured speeches from Conservative Members. I am becoming sick of how good natured the Committee is. We are dealing with a matter that is fundamental to the British people. It is serious, not only for those who work in the North Sea, but in the disposition of our assets. I do not like inordinate friendliness now that we have come to a guillotine.

The hon. Member for Banff said that we had always been under the threat of a guillotine. If so, it is even more shameful that the Government did not ask for a voluntary timetable.

Mr. Myles: As the right hon. Gentleman says, the Bill is important. It is important to the Government's strategy for breaking up the centralised control of our assets.

Dr. Mabon: Whichever Government are in power, they are entitled to get their business. In the last analysis the House is not entitled to deny them that.

Debate on the Bill is not being used to impede other business. We have all seen an innocent Bill filibustered to hold up another Bill, but this Bill is being argued on its merits or demerits.

In the 17 sittings so far we have not had inordinately long speeches. We did sit all night once. Like the hon. Member for Banff, I took advantage of my years to go home. Talking nonsense until 6 am or 7 am is a waste of intelligence and rational time, of which we are all short. We are, the good book says, allotted a certain span. It is silly to waste time on nonsense. I salute hon. Members

who had to stay or who decided to stay. It was a feat of endurance. I have done it many times, but it is no less foolish. It advances argument not one whit.

Apart from that sitting, it has been a good Committee. The hon. Member for Dunfermline (Mr. Douglas) may have been over-generous, but I believe that we had ministerial replies which were full of substance, because we had no substance to begin with. These ghostlike creatures, the articles of association, are to make their spectral appearance only at the end of this week, I believe.

Mr. Cunliffe: The Dead Sea scrolls.

Dr. Mabon: We pleaded for the articles of association even in draft or in part rather than not at all. Tooth by tooth we extracted from the Minister of State and the Secretary of State what they would mean.

The Social Democrats and the Liberals do not want the old system to continue of one side doing equally bad things to the other. I remember on one occasion when, through the night, the House discussed the cheese ration. I remember in 1950 when Adam McKinlay was denied a pair for a vote at 7 am, even though his wife was dying.

The late Lady Tweedsmuir told him to go home, as she would refuse to vote. She had guts. Those silly days were ended when the Labour Government said that prayers would last for only one and a half hours. At a stroke we stopped one of the most farcical post-war parliamentary nonsenses. One side or other must say that it will lay down the weapon. I should like the Government to say today that it really is wrong on reflection, to pass the motion.

I believe that it is right for the Government to negotiate with the Opposition parties about when they will get their Bill, if it is not at Easter, as is here proposed, then at Whitsun. Even then there will be plenty of time to get it through the House of Lords and to bring it back here for discussion so that by the end of the Session the Secretary of State has his Bill if he insists on having it in the way in which it is now packaged.

That is essentially the case that the Government must answer tonight. It is not the yah-boo of past quotations and present intentions, but a rational argument. This is an important Bill. Parts of it need to be debated properly and fully both here and in the other place. The Government ought seriously to consider withdrawing the motion and negotiating a voluntary timetable that will satisfy the Opposition and all the members of the Committee as well as other hon. Members on the Government Benches.

4.50 pm

Mr. Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I am not a member of the Standing Committee on the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill, so I have not experienced the hours of ennui on its Back Benches updating my joke book so I cannot begin to match the good humour and wit of my hon. Friends the Members for Banff (Mr. Myles) and for Devon, North (Mr. Speller). That will probably satisfy the right hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Mabon), who found my hon. Friends' remarks rather too good-tempered. My speech will be less so.

The Bill is extremely important. Both sides of the House agree about that. Anything to do with the price and availability of oil, gas and energy supplies, on which industry depends, is of immense importance. The general principles of the Bill were debated on Second Reading and the principle of privatisation and competition approved by the House.

As I am not a member of the Committee I have not heard the hours of debate there, but it is clear from comments that I have heard over the weeks from my hon. Friends, from what has been said today and from the reactions of Opposition Members that the efforts of the Opposition have been directed against acceptance of the principle of the Bill as approved by the House and not to trying to improve or modify the Bill as their experience and views dictate.

It is clear that the Opposition have sought to emasculate and to destroy the Bill. I am not in the least surprised to hear that. That is the Pavlovian reaction of the Labour Party when it is suggested that the public sector should be anything but expanded—their ears close and their minds stop working, but their tongues go on freewheel.

There are two reasons why I want to see the Bill passed quickly, apart from the fact that I support its general principles. First, oil exploration and search have been proved to be much healthier in private hands. That is how North Sea oil resources were developed in the first place—without a State company and without Government cash. Private investment and private ingenuity started that development with a speed and effectiveness far greater than the public sector could ever have matched. As a result, the community has benefited faster from the production of oil and gas and extra revenues have accrued to the Exchequer. Those benefits and revenues are much more likely to increase as a result of the greater privatisation of initiative and control which the Bill proposes.

There is a further consequence which is especially desirable at a time of recession. The capital sums raised by the sale can release funds for job-creating purposes. I should have thought that Opposition Members would welcome those objectives and results. Alternatively, the funds could be used to reduce the public sector borrowing and improve the outlook for interest rates, upon which future employment also depends.

It is a great shame that Opposition Members seek to delay a Bill for general dogmatic reasons when its effects would be of so much assistance in solving the problems of the recession, the economy and the high levels of unemployment, which are the subject of constant complaint by Opposition Members. Nevertheless, I realise that, because of their ideological attitudes, Opposition Members will discount those views. I remind them, however, that in 1977-78, under the general supervision of the IMF, the Labour Government sold off a large section—17 per cent.—of their North Sea holding in the shape of British Petroleum. That was part and parcel of temporarily greatly improved economic management and the economy moved much closer to an even keel as a result, although if Opposition Members are honest with themselves they will admit that those benefits were thrown away in the run-up to the General Election.

Dr. J. Dickson Mabon: When the Burmah Oil Company got into trouble, its shares fell to the Treasury. The Labour Government subsequently decided to reduce their holding to 51 per cent. That does not represent the selling off of 17 per cent. of North Sea oil assets.

Mr. Lloyd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I shall not pursue the details, which I suspect he knows better than I do, but is he suggesting that no BP shares found their way into private hands as a result of that Government decision?

Dr. Mabon: No.

Mr. Lloyd: That is exactly the point that I am making, and it is the point of the Bill, that North Sea oil assets that are at present owned by the Government should be transferred to private hands. I see no difference of principle. The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but it does not seem to affect the one I am making.

The Bill has another beneficial effect which leads me to hope to see it on the statute book in a reasonable time. Great benefit will flow from allowing gas producers freedom to find their own larger commercial customers. That is a much-needed change. The Director-General of the Chemical Industries Association has said:

"In recent months a number of chemical firms have requested and have been refused additional or new supplies of gas even in cases where greatly improved energy efficiency would have been achieved. Thus we have a thoroughly unsatisfactory situation where additional or new industrial gas supplies are not available to companies despite a 10 per cent. fall in industrial gas sales due to the recession. We are told that new supplies will not be available until 1984-85. There is no doubt that the best way forward is to permit wider freedom of access to gas supplies. It is misleading to argue that a monopoly to purchase supplies ensures the best price and availability to the final industrial gas user, even though the position may be comfortable for the operation of the monopoly. World evidence does not support such an opinion. We need the fresh breeze of competition to keep the supply industry on its toes and to ensure that energy is available to industry at an internationally competitive price as the world market for our products recovers."

That is absolutely right. There should be no delay in creating the conditions for which the Director General calls. That is why I strongly support the motion. It will put the Bill on the statute book at reasonable speed.

Finally, safety has been mentioned. This is an important consideration if these arrangements are made for piping gas ashore and producers to supply customers direct. It is appalling that so much time seems to have been spent in Committee on general principles that were settled on Second Reading, when there are important practical questions relating to such dangerous matters as these later in the Bill.

I hope that the House will adopt the timetable programme so that a proper amount of time can be allocated to these extremely important questions on which I believe that Opposition Members, especially those who have connections with trade unions and people working in industry, would be well placed to make practical and helpful suggestions.

I commend the motion to the House.

5 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Rother Valley): I do not wish to pursue the points of the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd) very far, except to hope that he will find time to read the *Official Report* of some of the Committee debates. He will then appreciate that a considerable part of the Committee's time has been spent pursuing one of the items that attracted his attention—the fact that funds will flow from privatisation. The Opposition sought to ensure that those funds would be more wisely spent than the Government's record so far would lead one to expect.

I found the speeches of the hon. Members for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) and Banff (Mr. Myles) quite delightful. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Devon, North. I believe that all Bills should be timetabled. I take a revolutionary view of Standing Committees. I do not see why experts should not be called to give relevant

evidence. Indeed, I suggested that Rothschild and Morgan Grenfell might properly be called to give evidence on the highly relevant question of Amersham International. Timetables are desirable. There must be safeguards, of course, because the Opposition's only weapon is time. Nevertheless, I trust that the next Labour Government will be prepared to introduce timetable motions.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may appreciate that it is not my experience of the Committee on this Bill that has led me to that conclusion. I have always said that I should be reluctant to serve on demanding Standing Committees after the one that you chaired with dedication such that we found it extremely hard to stray from the path of relevance, just as it was impossible for us to do so in Committee on this Bill. I was delighted that the Lord President of the Council acknowledged that references to the poem that I quoted, which was entirely relevant, and to Tudor history were not out of order. I should have hated to have incurred that criticism.

The points that we have sought to make in Committee are important, as I hope that the hon. Member for Fareham will recognise, not from the point of view of any dogma of ours, but to ensure that the application of the Government's dogma does not inflict too great a disadvantage on the national interest.

The Minister of State, whom we regard with some cordiality, claimed in the Committee to be meticulous in his provision of replies, and there were periods when he dedicated himself to that purpose. On one occasion, he answered with care 16 questions from my hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell). Nevertheless, I, too, asked him a large number of questions and the answers were not entirely satisfactory.

My questions to the Minister were basic and fundamental. I believe for example, that it was entirely relevant to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that between 1973 and 1980, year by year, the share of the United Kingdom continental shelf orders accruing to British industry had increased. When the Labour Government took office, only about one-third of the orders arising from offshore contracts were fulfilled by British industry. By the end of Labour's term of office, that had increased to 79 per cent.—a very commendable rate of progress. In the first year of the Conservative Government, however, for the first time since 1973, the share of orders fell fairly substantially from 79 per cent. to 71 per cent. Representing an area of special steels, which is a highly relevant industry, I felt it right to press that point and to suggest to the Minister that steps should be taken to guarantee that that fall would not continue, and that British industrial interests would be protected. I have received no satisfactory assurance that this privatisation, which will take the Government further away from the role of influence and involvement in decision-making, will have any advantage for British industry, so the assumption about the Minister's meticulous approach scarcely extends to that important matter.

I also asked a number of related questions. I referred to a number of oilfields in which BNOC is involved—in some cases the involvement is substantial—and asked for an absolute assurance that investment in industrial plant relating to those fields would not lead to a diminution of their contribution to the economy. Again, no adequate response was forthcoming.

I illustrated my point by reference to the Piper and Claymore fields of Occidental. The House will recall that

a couple of years ago great public attention was given to the mutual admiration of Dr. Hammer and the Prime Minister. The television companies projected and presented the image of a massive mutual confidence which would be of enormous advantage to Britain. When it was later discovered, in October or November last year, that Occidental's plans had been substantially cut, the media unfortunately did not give that the attention that they had given to the original announcements. It is right that the Committee should consider the implications of matters of that kind, as British industry cannot afford to take the blows that may result from these changes.

It is also right that the instability of the Government's policy should be considered in detail by the Committee. We pointed out that since they came to office the Government have changed the offshore tax regime on seven occasions. No doubt, changes in one direction or another will make tomorrow the eighth occasion. The pace of offshore development is not helped by rapid changes in tax arrangements or legislation. Unfortunately, we have still not received adequate assurances about that.

The application of a timetable may be against the national interest in respect of serious safety problems which may arise with regard to gas. Only last week, I produced for the Committee evidence of the impressive safety record of British Gas in the installation of appliances of all kinds. It is clear that people wishing to have gas appliances installed in their homes stand a far better chance of the work being carried out with complete safety by British Gas than by some cowboy operator. I provided all the figures, so I shall not labour the point now, but we have received no satisfactory assurances about safety.

We have also not received a satisfactory response to the evidence of the weeks following the original announcement by the then Minister of State for Consumer Affairs about the disposal of gas showrooms. It is clear that, within days of that announcement, companies began to arrange for and to initiate the import of gas appliances. I believe that one of the responsibilities of this or any Government is to ensure that British industrial interests are properly protected. I see no advantage or virtue whatever in the Government embarking on a policy that will bring comfort to our industrial competitors and lead to further contraction and redundancy in Britain. Undoubtedly, if the gas showrooms close, foreign manufacturers will gain considerable benefit.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Why?

Mr. Hardy: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to add to that, I will give way. It seems that he does not.

Within a week of the announcement that the gas showrooms were to be closed, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that shiploads and lorryloads of gas appliances were on their way to this country. There are a number of reasons for it. One of the reasons, which was the subject of questions earlier today, is that foreign Governments are eager to assist their industries, while our Government stand aloof and rather distant. That has been the case with energy prices.

The most important aspect of energy, which has already been touched on with reference to the articles of association, is price. We have been given little guidance, and the Committee, in the view of one or two Conservative Members, was expected to rubber stamp the Government's

proposals, albeit without having seen the articles of association, and in the face of the appalling experience of the Amersham disposal.

I hope that the House and the country will note the relevant suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Deptford (Mr. Silkin). The Secretary of State would like to go down as the man who was responsible for the biggest programme of privatisation in our history. He would welcome that.

He would not welcome that if a long view is taken, but he ought to accept responsibility for the implementation of my right hon. Friend's suggestion, and for the word "Amersham" to go down as an appropriate new word that could be used as an alternative to "profligacy" to describe someone acting culpably and in opposition to the national interest.

Mr. Myles: I noticed in Committee that Labour Members were always anxious to give way in order to take up more time. I wish to refer to Amersham and to the selling of BNOC shares. If the shares go on to the market and are bought by employees or others—private small investors—and the price goes down, will the hon. Gentleman complain, or will he say that that serves the purchasers right?

Mr. Hardy: In the first debate on Amersham I suggested, and was subjected to a certain amount of ridicule from Conservative Members, that if they were to dispose of the company, given the tributes that they had paid to the work force, the least that they could do was to establish a co-operative.

My second point, which aroused even more anger and opposition from Conservative Members, was that before the Bill became law, the Government should say specifically by how much the nation should benefit, and that the House should not approve the proposition until there was more information about the economic consequences of the disposal. It may be that, had the Government displayed more responsibility and caution over Amersham last week, the national interest and the Government's reputation might be better.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House of the price at which the Labour Government launched the shares of BP, and the price at which the shares were quoted when they finally appeared on the market? Would the hon. Gentleman not agree that this sale of public assets to the private sector represented a sale of about 9 per cent. of North Sea oil production?

Mr. Hardy: I always think that it is a pity that hon. Members who have not been members of the Committees should take part in a timetable debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I am trying to explain, and I am prepared to give way to the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Viscount Cranborne) if he wishes to speak.

We are all extremely busy. Those outside do not understand how much work hon. Members have to do. I doubt whether the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) has read even one of the many volumes of reports of the Committee's proceedings. He may have started to read one. I hope that he finds entertainment and enlightenment there, but if he goes through them all he will see that the Committee devoted considerable attention to the matter to which he referred, and I do not propose to be excessively repetitive.

Mr. Garell-Jones: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have read the reports of the Committee's proceedings, and I read with care many of his speeches. On one occasion he spoke for 20 minutes without mentioning oil, gas or enterprise. He preferred to talk about Sir Arthur Bryant and J. K. Galbraith. He should withdraw what he said about me.

Mr. Hardy: I am astonished. The hon. Gentleman seems to imagine that we have to be extremely careful about amendments that may not include the words "oil and gas", but are, nevertheless, relevant. The House may find it boring, but I should explain to the hon. Gentleman the relevance of my reference to the Tudor period, to which the Leader of the House referred. I described how Queen Elizabeth I saw the error of her ways and did an economic U-turn and decided to change her economic policies. I suggested that what was good for Queen Elizabeth I was good for the Prime Minister. It seemed to me that the model of Queen Elizabeth in the sixteenth century had some relevance to our current economic position.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): I know that the hon. Gentleman has a strong academic background and he will, therefore, recall that one of the evils of our economic situation in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was that there was far too much granting of monopoly by the Crown. Will the hon. Gentleman draw the same conclusion that my hon. Friends and I have drawn on that subject?

Mr. Hardy: I doubt whether any of my ancestors enjoyed the benefit of a sale of a monopoly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. No doubt the hon. Gentleman could enlighten us about such sales. The fact remains that in a relatively similar period of our history there was a dramatic U-turn that should be repeated by the Government.

I hope that in the wretchedly meagre time provided for further consideration of the details of the Bill we shall get answers to the questions that have already been asked.

I particularly ask the Secretary of State to ensure that more attention is paid to the last matter that exercised the Committee's mind on Thursday. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, West (Mr. Brown) moved an amendment to provide funds for general conservation. I suggested—I hope in a non-partisan manner; Conservative Members will know whether I was partisan—that the removal of State influence offshore, which was inevitable, given the Government's proposals, and the need for greater provision for conservation made the amendment entirely appropriate.

I do not think that Conservative Members spoke in favour of the amendment, but I felt that some of them could see merit in our argument. Unfortunately, the Under-Secretary who wound up, briefly referred only to energy conservation and a visit to Newcastle. The whole argument that I advanced in, I hope, a non-partisan manner, and on behalf, I believe, of all the conservation bodies in these islands, received no response. I hope that sooner or later a more generous attitude will be displayed. I regret that the answer given on that occasion was grossly unsatisfactory.

There has already been reference to the Tudor period and the economic policies of Elizabeth I. The most distinguished citizen from the Rother Valley constituency was Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stratford. He was

impeached. His offence was far less serious than that being perpetrated by the Secretary of State in the Bill. I only hope that, as my party proceeds to prepare itself for the next general election, maintaining its commitment entirely to the cause of parliamentary democracy, it will during that period of preparation—

Mr. Gordon Wilson: Without bloodshed.

Mr. Hardy:—and without bloodshed, at this stage anyway, look up the references and study the precedents to see how we can reintroduce the principle and practice of impeachment. It has never been more justified than it is in relation to the Bill.

5.21 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I always enjoy the speeches of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Hardy) on almost any subject. I enjoyed the visit to Sir Arthur Bryant and J. K. Galbraith. I should have enjoyed listening to the hon. Gentleman speak about badgers, on which he is an expert, or on moles, a subject on which I once consulted him. I shall, however, pursue only his remarks in relation to Amersham International Ltd.

It would be wrong not to make it clear that the benefit of hindsight has been applied by many sudden experts to this issue. They do not perhaps realise that if the issue had been pitched in a different way—for instance, by way of tender—or if the price had been slightly higher, the net amount received by the Government at the end of the day might have been lower because of the substantial amount that they received by way of interest on the large number of applications for shares. The large number of applications also enabled those sponsoring the issue to make sure that the smaller applicants were granted a higher proportion of the shares than larger applicants, including the pension funds of the mineworkers and others. It would be wrong if the record were not put straight on that point.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman talks of the benefit of hindsight. Some hon. Members serving on the Committee not only found that Amersham was predictable, but that it was predicted, foreseeable and actually foreseen.

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell) quoted an example of a commentator who, he reported, was able to show that the price was not as high as it might have been. I put it to the hon. Member that the press comment at the time of the issue was by no means unanimous. An issue needs to be pitched in such a way that it is attractive to those who might participate. If there is a good response, that is a success and not a failure. It is wrong to say that the price was incorrectly pitched and that everyone knew this beforehand. That is not the situation.

Mr. Garell-Jones: Does my hon. Friend recall that about a year ago when this matter was first discussed the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands), speaking for the Opposition, was insistent that when this launch took place the Government should not go down the route of seeking to get what he called the highest price available but should go down a route that would ensure that as many small shareholders and members of the British public as possible would be able to participate?

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend reminds me of a point that I had overlooked. I am grateful to him for making an important point.

Debates on timetable motions tend to be as formalised as a Petrarchan sonnet. There are complaints from one side and justification from the other. I should like to examine what is happening under the timetable motion. I should declare interests in the oil and gas industry. I had hoped that the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Cryer) would be present. The hon. Gentleman always rushes into the Chamber to ask whether I have declared my interest. I have always done so. I am not, in fact, declaring an interest. I am declaring two interests.

The purpose of the Bill is to allow a sale of some of BNOC's oil-producing business. This is an excellent idea, for three major reasons. As seen recently in the price of oil, large risks are involved in oil and gas exploration and production. There is no need for the Government to speculate on oil and gas futures. The Government are sufficiently committed and capable to reap the benefit that they require and to which they are entitled from the North Sea by way of taxation. Even taxation can produce amounts less than had been originally expected if the price goes down, as can happen, as well as if it goes up.

There is no reason why the Government should be directly involved as an owner of oil and gas futures, which would be the case if they ran the operation themselves. The risks are best taken by private enterprise. It has already been stated that, overwhelmingly, the achievements in the North Sea have been those of private industry.

A second major reason for the sale of some of BNOC's oil-producing business is to enable the British people directly to participate in oil and gas development to the extent that they wish. Taking up a point that has been made about Amersham, I suspect that when the time comes to sell shares in Britoil, it will be necessary to pitch the sale by way of part tender and part public offer. I suspect that there will need to be more than one way of selling the shares to the British people. It should be remembered that the largest numbers of shares are held by institutions and that these are overwhelmingly insurance companies and pension funds. In saying that the British people will participate in oil and gas development, I mean that they are precisely the people who will benefit and participate. It is those who participate through insurance companies and pension funds.

The third major reason for a sale of some of BNOC's oil-producing business is that a sale of 51 per cent. of Britoil will enable the company to proceed to invest private capital as it wishes in oil and gas development. This explains, no doubt, why the Chairman of BNOC has welcomed the Bill.

The Bill is needed because it will allow the disposal of certain assets of the British Gas Corporation. There is to be a sale one day of Wytch Farm. I say "one day" because the Secretary of State has exercised his power and right to require the British Gas Corporation to dispose of Wytch Farm, but there seems no alacrity so far on the part of the corporation to do so. There will also be the introduction of competition, thus changing the British Gas Corporation's monopsony position. I am sure that this will also benefit the consumer in the long run.

I come now to the case for a timetable motion. The only weapon of the Opposition is, of course, time. It is right that the Opposition's major weapon should be time. It is also important that the weapon should not be abused. The fact that a timetable motion is needed is similar to a divorce

in marriage. It shows that there has been a breakdown in communication somewhere along the line. It shows that there has been an abuse of the position—

Mr. Cunliffe: As the Opposition Whip dealing with the Bill in Committee, I have had maximum consultation and the fullest co-operation with the Government Whip. We have discussed over a long period ways of accelerating the progress of the Bill. This has been extremely difficult. It is misleading to give the impression that hon. Members have been able to debate in detail all the technicalities of what is the most wide-ranging Bill presented to the House for many years. Some fundamental documents—the articles of association—were missing and are still missing. Hon. Members have tried, by probing, argument and persuasion in Committee, to obtain the articles of association. It was therefore inconceivable that any agreement could be reached on a practical timetable that would allow rational debate on the issues concerned.

Mr. Viggers: The articles of association of Britoil have become the most famous piece of paper since Chamberlain returned from Munich. I do not know how many hon. Members have read articles of association from cover to cover. I suspect that they will not amount to a large number. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy explained in column 171 of *Hansard* of 19 January effectively what the articles of association would contain. He made the point that the articles of association would protect the position of the company, should there be an attempt to take it over. He went on to give further details of the articles of association and said that there would be two Government directors of the board of Britoil as long as the size of the Government holding warranted it.

The outline of the articles of association have been made clear, and I do not think that a long debate on the articles, which amount to a technical legal document, can justify a long delay in Committee. I refute that.

Dr. J. Dickson Mabon: The hon. Member may have seen the articles of association but the Opposition have not. One of the fundamental questions that has not been answered and which must appeal to the hon. Gentleman is: how can a temporary majority be exercised by somebody who owns 0 per cent. of the shares, which is theoretically possible under the Bill?

Mr. Viggers: The right hon. Gentleman seeks to make a point of substance, but the way in which the articles of association will tackle this problem has been spelled out by my right hon. Friend. The detail of the wording may not be produced. I have not seen the articles of association and do not know the technical reason why they have not been produced. I have no doubt that the detail of the drafting is causing considerable work to lawyers. But it is a technical legal point. The absence of a technical legal document should not cause the Committee a great deal of distress.

Mr. W. E. Garrett: The technical legal problem is precisely why we were seeking information. It is important for the hon. Member to realise that we who are not lawyers are blessed with common sense. One of the reasons why we look at these documents is that we distrust so many of the lawyers who present them.

Mr. Viggers: I respect the hon. Gentleman's view, but I do not think that the absence of one document, which is by nature a technical document, ought to delay discussions on the other issues in Committee.

We heard the "sound and fury" from the Opposition Benches on the subject of safety and how concerned they were about that issue, but they have failed to debate the important issues involved in safety, which I accept as important. I do not believe that the absence of the articles of association ought to postpone or delay that important debate.

Mr. Robert Atkins (Preston, North): I am not a member of the Committee and I have come to the debate to hear the discussion. From all that I have heard and from what my hon. Friend has been saying about the "sound and fury" generated on the Opposition Benches, I assumed that there would be a few more Opposition Members here. Has my hon. Friend noticed that there is only one Opposition Back Bencher here? Is that not an indictment of the synthetic nature of this attack against Government policy?

Mr. Viggers: I can only agree. I should like any descendent of mine to read in *Hansard* that the House is empty not because I am speaking, but because Opposition Members are not interested in the debate.

The right hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Mabon), for whom I have the highest regard—I enjoy telling him that I may not be a doctor from Greenock, but I married one—put forward the proposal that a timetable motion should be introduced at an early stage in Committee. Unfortunately, it is not quite that simple, and I am sure the right hon. Member will realise that when he considers the facts.

Until the timetable motion is taken in Committee it tends to be the Opposition who make the speeches, with the Government staying fairly quiet. Once a timetable motion has been tabled and the Committee knows where it is going and how much time is available, the Trappist Benches of the Government suddenly reel out long urbane speeches with hidden depths not thought of before. Therefore, it is not good enough to say that a timetable motion is needed from the beginning. What is needed is a greater understanding between the usual channels on both sides and an attempt to ration time more sensibly, as I am sure everyone will wish to be the case.

Dr. J. Dickson Mabon: A voluntary timetable does not necessarily call for a motion to be put forward in Committee. It is agreed between the Whips or between the two Front Benches. I have dealt with many Bills, from both the Opposition and Government Front Benches, on which we have agreed voluntary timetable systems. That is what we are talking about, and that is what we should have done here.

Mr. Viggers: I am not a member of this Committee and I am not sure how it is operating, but I am a member of a Standing Committee. The right hon. Gentleman no longer represents the Labour Party for Greenock and Port Glasgow, but he will understand that one of the complications about the usual channels is that it is not possible for the Government side of the usual channels to know how the minority parties will be voting or attending. One waits to see them turn up in Committee, which requires a compromise, and then we hear their usual

speeches about on the one hand or on the other, which rather complicates the issue, because we do not know how they will make a stand.

Mr. Archie Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): Is it not true that on almost every significant Division that we have had since the SDP was formed it has supported the Opposition? Perhaps it can be counted in with the official Opposition and is almost indistinguishable from them?

Mr. Viggers: To demonstrate how the minority parties are lining up on one side or the other, I can tell my hon. Friend that in the Employment Bill Standing Committee we have the support of the Liberal Member. They are remaining all things to all men.

The world has changed in the eight years that I have been privileged to be a Member of the House. Life cannot have been the same after 20 July 1976 and 8 November 1976, when the right hon. Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr. Foot), who is now the leader of the official Opposition, introduced, respectively, motions relating to five and four timetables. Before that timetables were matters of "sound and fury". I shall not continue that quotation too far, because I see that

"it is a tale told by an idiot"

The right hon. Member for Ebbw Vale used to make good speeches, so that would be inappropriate.

Is a timetable motion needed? I do not accept that the Committee should have been delayed by the absence of the articles of association of Britoil. Secondly, the British Gas Corporation is showing no inclination to sell its Wytch Farm interest or to hurry the process of widening the gas supply system. The voters voted for the measures in the Bill and the motion is needed to put this into effect.

My last question is: do we really need to debate timetable motions such as this? It is open to the Government to produce a timetable motion and it is up to the Opposition to debate the motion if there is intense public interest in the issue. On the basis of the Opposition attendance today, that interest is a disgrace.

5.37 pm

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): If Conservative Members once again go into Opposition they have shown their ability to procrastinate. We may see future guillotine motions in which they will hold the opposite view. The interesting thing about these debates is that whenever there is a change of Government it does not seem to change the speeches. Both Government and Opposition speeches are always the same.

I have held the view since my first faltering days in the House that it would be desirable for all Bills to be timetabled from the beginning. I have gone further than that since then, having heard a number of timetable debates, and having come to the conclusion that they, too, ought to be guillotined at the outset. Taking up the point of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) I should have thought that a vote on guillotine motions would have been sufficient.

With regard to this timetable motion I enter a few caveats. To begin with, we are considering a timetable motion, as we normally do, when we are only about a third of the way through the Bill, with only about 20 per cent. of the time left for debating it. So if there had been a timetable motion at the start, there would have been a possibility of dividing the time available for debate between its different parts. The problem is how to fix the

time for such a motion. I would think that, depending on the complexity of the Bill, and its length, it could be safely left to the Clerks, on the basis of precedents, to fix a suitable time. I think that all parties would accept that. In one way or another, debates on timetable motions turn out to be parliamentary scandals. They are a complete waste of time.

The question is whether the Bill should be guillotined at this stage. I take the view that, because of the unbalanced nature of debate that it would cause, it would be wrong, though if an overall timetable had been laid down in advance, with the right of sub-division of the time available, I should have voted for it.

I oppose a guillotine in this instance because I do not believe that the Government can get round the absence of the articles of association. They may argue that they have set out the main terms of ownership in speeches, but Oppositions are entitled to see the text that is likely to be subject to eventual construction or adoption. It should be stressed that we did not demand the final glistening text, which is to be produced by the team of lawyers who are alleged to be crawling over it. We would have been prepared to accept a broad draft, especially as it affected the main clauses of the Bill. There is no doubt that the absence of the articles of association caused a protraction of the Committee's debates on clauses 1, 2 and 3.

Then we have to consider the nature of the Bill. Whereas the Petroleum and Submarine Pipe-lines Act 1975 dealt with the oil industry, this measure deals with two industries—the oil industry and the gas industry.

In a way, the privatisation of the British National Oil Corporation is relatively simple, though highly controversial. But for the British Gas Corporation we have a proposal for privatisation that has side effects on the supply of gas. The breaking of the monopoly of the BGC is again a complex and controversial aspect. The use of pipelines is a matter that should be discussed in detail, bearing in mind that members of the Committee have received representations from the National Farmers Union about it. It is worried that a proposal of this kind could lead to a duplication or replication of pipelines. There are interests other than those of oil and gas consumers who are concerned about that.

Petroleum production licences form a relatively minor part of the Bill, but offshore activities and safety matters are subjects on which we could have spent a considerable and useful amount of time.

If the Government's proposal were only to limit the Committee stage of the Bill, that would have conditioned my attitude to the guillotine motion. I should have wanted to make sure that we had a great deal of time available to discuss the important aspects of safety, in view especially of the serious accidents that have occurred during the past two years. We want to make sure that the incidence of accidents is lessened, by having the opportunity to discuss the safety considerations more fully. I am sure that Government supporters share my worry about what might happen if we did not make sure that our safety regulations were adequate to deal with the problem, especially in the very exceptional weather conditions that can be encountered.

I do not wish to say a great deal more, because I have said that my opposition to the motion is based on the fact that the time available for discussion will be unbalanced and that we have a great many more important matters to discuss.

In my view, at least one representative of the smaller parties should be included on the Business Committee, so that there is a degree of consultation at that level about what is discussed in the Bill. There are precedents for that. The Standing Committee has two minority party representatives on it. In my view, at least one of those should be included on the Business Committee.

I do not intend to rehearse that controversial nature of the Bill or to go through its text. We have done that in Committee and we hope that on Report and during what remains to us of the Committee stage we shall do so again. However, the Bill—the earlier part of it especially—represents a very important measure to hon. Members who represent Scottish constituencies. It puts at risk a great many jobs in Scotland. As a Scottish Member, I should have felt that I had not done my duty in the Standing Committee if we had not tested the Government's intentions about the protection of the jobs at present made available through BNOG.

5.45 pm

Mr. Archie Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): It is a matter of great sadness to me that I am not a member of the Standing Committee that is considering the Bill. I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the present Secretary of State for Transport, who, at the Department of Energy, played a leading role in producing the Bill. It would have been a great pleasure for me to play a role in steering the Bill through its Committee stage.

We have heard that the Committee has had 70 hours of debate and 17 sittings and is still only a short way through the Bill, having considered only the provisions that deal with the British National Oil Corporation. That being so, the discussion has been extensive, to put it mildly, and I feel that perhaps there is a degree of hypocrisy on the part of Opposition Members when they talk about the measure not being properly discussed. By all accounts it is good-natured hypocrisy, but it is hypocrisy all the same.

I support the motion. It is vital that the Government get the Bill through the House. It is probably one of the most important Bills that will be passed in this Parliament. The Government were elected on a manifesto that spoke of "rolling back" the State, and the Bill is one of the most significant pieces of denationalisation to be carried out by the Government and it is one of which we shall be very proud in the future.

When we come to consider the British National Oil Corporation, we have to remind ourselves that the development of the North Sea and its oil resources was a triumph of private industry. In practice, the early work done on it owed almost nothing to the then Government other than that the Secretary of State at the time farmed out certain blocks and told people that they could explore them. From there, all that the British National Oil Corporation did was climb on the backs of the private oil companies, leech them and build up its influence purely on the success of the private oil industry.

Mr. Cunliffe: Will the hon. Gentleman be congratulating and paying tribute to the private developers in the North Sea and at the same time commending the British Gas Corporation for its skill, enterprise, initiative and ingenuity? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a poor reward for the BGC's success to hive off all the hard and dedicated work that it has put in and to sell off an asset that it produced through its own initiative, backing and flair for that kind of work?

Mr. Hamilton: We are discussing two separate organisations—BNOC, which commands a very small amount of North Sea oil reserves, and the British Gas Corporation, which is a monopoly, which has monopoly rights to sell to everyone in the country, and which has also managed to organise matters so that it has complete monopoly rights over all the gas that it buys. The hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) cannot compare the one organisation with the other. We have to ensure that both of them end up in the private sector, where they are subjected to competition, which is the only way in which we can guarantee that the British taxpayer will not at some stage be asked to fork out because, for some mysterious reason, or because of political interference, they start making losses. I am delighted that the corporation will be returned to the private sector and that we shall have another independent company operating in the North Sea.

Mr. Myles: My hon. Friend spoke of the possibility of the corporation becoming unprofitable. We hear a great deal from the Opposition about the Government selling off profitable companies to private industry. I have put the question to Opposition Members in Committee, but so far no one has answered it. What was the criterion for nationalising an industry? Was it to provide a service to the public which was not being done profitably in private hands, or was it to get a profit, which the Opposition seemed to think that it was?

Mr. Hamilton: My knowledge of Socialist politics and history is relatively limited, but the initial idea always seems to be that somehow it is possible to give this great service to the public and make a profit at the same time. Of course, the chances to make a profit were soon thrown away, and the taxpayer, basically, had to carry the burden. Then the service to the public bit the dust, as the monopoly unions which invariably control these industries started taking their grip of the situation. In the end, the taxpayer was having to find vast sums of money to bail out monopoly unions, which had none of the controls of the market place and thus no incentives to become more efficient. The taxpayer was always there to pay the bill. There is no better example of that today than the mining industry, which has great powers. The taxpayer invariably ends up paying for the inefficiencies of that industry, and about £1,000 million a year seems to be more than enough.

It will be possible for the British National Oil Corporation to expand in a way that was not possible in the past, once it is back in the private sector. There were people in the corporation who initially may have thought that a cosy relationship could be had by being under Government control. That all changed dramatically at the time of the development of the Clyde oilfield, which BNOC wanted to bring on stream as a natural extension of its trading activities. The corporation had to go to the Treasury, which said: "We are sorry, your commercial and trading interests take second place to the Government's cash flow and the public sector borrowing requirement. So you cannot have the money that you need to develop the oilfield. The money will come on stream two years later than you have asked for it."

It was at that moment in the life of BNOC that it realised that it did not make any difference whether it was making money or whether it was not making money—ultimately, the Treasury was there controlling every investment that it made. How could a major

international oil company—which I sincerely hope that BNOC will become and is now on the way to becoming—have to go back to the Government all the time and ask whether it could invest in new fields and build new rigs? It is encouraging that BNOC is making incursions into overseas markets and other areas, but it does so in the confidence that it will be in a position to go to the private sector for finance. If it has to come hobbling back to the Treasury, with all the ups and downs of public sector spending, and so on, its growth will be inhibited, as will its chances of employment, about which the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) expressed such concern.

Viscount Cranborne: While my hon. Friend is on that subject, would he care to speculate about whether it would be any easier for BNOC to explore for oil in foreign countries if it were an independent company rather than a creature of the British Government?

Mr. Hamilton: There is definite evidence that it would be much easier for BNOC to operate in those circumstances. Also, of course, it would be much easier to co-operate and become part of consortia, with other oil companies. I gather that BNOC is now doing that.

I have no great faith in politicians. I say that in a non-partisan way. I do not believe in the capacity of politicians of any colour to run industries. I have yet to meet any political party which does not believe that it is in the national interest to win the next election. In profitable industries under public control there is a great tendency or temptation to invest in certain areas—where there are marginal seats, for instance—which may have no commercial benefit but which may swing a marginal seat. I could see future Governments seriously considering whether BNOC should invest in refineries, ignoring the enormous over-capacity of refineries in this country. That would be unlikely to worry politicians. I could even see them starting to sell petrol in filling stations if it were thought that that would fulfil some short-term political ambition. It is, therefore, a healthy trend to remove the companies from the influence of Government interference.

Then there is the past record of BNOC. It was used by the Labour Government as a tool to interfere and play a tiresome role in the North Sea with other companies on the operating committees, and so on. That was bitterly resented at the time. That will not happen again if we privatise the company, and it is something for which we should all be grateful.

There was a great cry about us losing control of oil from the United Kingdom continental shelf. That is nonsense, because for our landing rights—all our North Sea oil has to be landed in the United Kingdom—the 51 per cent. participation options exercised by BNOC will come under Government control. That gives us control of about 1.3 million barrels per day. On top of that, there has always been reserve emergency legislation to enable the Government to take complete control of all oil produced anywhere around these shores in the event of war or anything of that nature. So it is nonsense to pretend that the Government are losing control of North Sea oil reserves. There is nothing whatsoever to support that contention.

We have a good precedent to go on, in that the Labour Government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) reminded us, sold shares in British petroleum. That Government had good reasons for doing

so at the time. The International Monetary Fund was on their backs, and the Government had to raise money because the country was in severe debt. Indeed, I hope that the remaining 49 per cent. of BNOG may come under the same pressure at a later stage. It is rather nice that Governments of the future will have cushions of shares in oil companies which they can sell in times of stress. The right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) was Secretary of State for Energy at the time when the BP shares were sold. It is interesting to see how Opposition has changed a man who was capable of moderate deeds such as that but who is capable of such thoroughly immoderate words and actions today.

Then there are the oil interests of the British Gas Corporation. In my view, it was a great tragedy that the chairman of the British Gas Corporation was given the opportunity to create a separate subsidiary of those oil interests which the British Gas Corporation employees could have continued to manage, thus keeping control. It would have been possible to float a separate oil company worth about £500 million, including, of course, the Wyth Farm interests and other BGC interests. It would have preserved employment in the BGC, which did not seem to matter very much to the chairman of the BGC, and it would have created a new independent British oil company.

I am sure that all hon. Members would see that as a good objective because, by comparison with the United States, we in this country still have few oil companies. It would have given us another oil company, opened up the market place and introduced a healthy element of competition. However, for some reason, the BGC considered that that was not desirable or possible. The chance was missed. The oil interests of the BGC will probably now be sold off piecemeal, and the great opportunity to give the managers and employees of the BGC a continuing role in the oil industry and create a new, separate oil company has been missed. It only goes to show the shortsighted attitude of the BGC, which is most regrettable.

We shall see the breaking of the gas monopsony, a matter of great importance. At present, the BGC has the sole buying rights of all gas supplies from the North Sea. It has many effects on production, not the least of which is that people have been discouraged from producing further reserves of gas. Indeed, by now we should probably have had a private gas-gathering line which would have been financed by international oil companies. I am sure that that would have happened if the BGC had paid a slightly higher price for its gas. As a result of its monopsony powers the production of gas has been depressed and many international oil companies have chosen to leave their gas reserves in the ground because of the poor price paid by the BGC after extraction.

The most exciting aspect of the legislation is the breaking of BGC's monopoly on selling gas to the public. We must all look forward to that because, if one of our major energy enterprises is denationalised, that will represent a great breakthrough. The Opposition accuse the Government of creaming off the profits or of guaranteeing that prices will increase. However, they cannot have it both ways. Either enormous profits will be creamed off by private industry, or competition will lead to a reduction in prices. We should all welcome that and, in addition, British industry would benefit.

6 pm

Mr. W. E. Garrett (Wallsend): The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) implied that he would have liked to have been a member of the Committee. However, having listened to his dull and boring speech, I am glad that he was not a member. He does not match up to the humour and knowledge of other Conservative Members and should have made his points in a less dogmatic and more humanitarian manner.

The Leader of the House did not show much enthusiasm for the motion and his approach was low key. I think that he felt that justice was not being done. In the three or four minutes allocated to me, I hope to show that the guillotine motion has been introduced too early. The Bill has 36 clauses. The first nine clauses on the oil industry and related forms of energy have been dealt with. Indeed, I concede that far too much time was spent on those clauses. At one time, Committee members felt that they were members of the Scottish Grand Committee because those representing Scottish constituencies made such long interventions.

However, two-thirds of the Bill remains to be discussed and those provisions relate to the gas industry. There is tremendous meat in the remaining clauses. The Secretary of State should consult his colleagues about precedents. In terms of political philosophy a parallel can be drawn with the Labour Government's decision to nationalise British Shipbuilders and British Aerospace. The two companies were covered by one Bill. On that occasion, the guillotine was not imposed until the Committee had sat for many more than 17 sittings. Indeed, I believe that it took 56 sittings to complete discussion of the Bill. Almost to the end, we were allowed to debate fully the most controversial matters. In Opposition, Conservative Members used their time wisely and fought as they thought right, according to their political principles.

There are still 24 or 25 clauses of this Bill to be debated. Much more time could have been allocated to some of the very serious issues. As the Minister knows, some of the remaining clauses are more technical than political. It might have been better for us all if we had been able to debate the political content of some of the remaining clauses. It may well be that some of my hon. Friends' tactics were unwise and that we made an error of judgment in concentrating too much on the energy and oil provisions. However, that is in the past. Given that we have discussed 10 clauses in three weeks, we should have been allowed at least another three weeks—or another 12 sittings—before the imposition of a guillotine.

We must think ahead. The threat of a guillotine hangs over two other Committees. It would be bad to curtail political debate too much. The Secretary of State is a man of strong political feelings. Before he became a member of the Cabinet, he expressed them fairly, honestly, vigorously and determinedly. Other hon. Members would also like the opportunity to express their views similarly. It is not always possible to put across views on the Floor of the House. Some hon. Members are not very good at debating on the Floor of the House, but are brilliant in Committee. It is a shame to deny their expertise and knowledge by imposing a guillotine. Ultimately, we must try—across the political spectrum—to reach a fair solution to political problems.

The guillotine motion is a very unsatisfactory device and I deplore it. Sooner or later—perhaps not in my

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time—the House must find an alternative. If we do not do so, we shall continue to deny the principles of democracy to which we are all pledged. The Leader of the House should be made fully aware that, despite the lack of fury and vigour in the debate, there is a feeling that the system is unsatisfactory. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman would do both himself and the Government credit if he were to initiate a procedure—through the usual channels—to eliminate the present method of cutting democratic discussion. I know that that is difficult and has been tried before, but I appeal to the Minister to convey my feelings to the Leader of the House at the end of the debate.

6.6 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Leeds, South): I certainly sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for WallSEND (Mr. Garrett). I also sympathise with the hon. Members for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) and Banff (Mr. Myles)—who are both new to the House—who questioned the way in which we deal with Bills. The Committee was good natured and, at times, amusing. We learnt a great deal. Today, no one is listening and nobody cares, and sometimes we clap ourselves to death. Standing Committees are useless for discussing industries, whether publicly or privately owned. The public do not listen to our debates, although they are reported in *Hansard*. Many of my constituents are miners and steel workers and when I tell them that I have been up all night, they say "You must be daft." We are daft, but we will not do anything about it.

The hon. Member for Banff asked a perfectly proper question about the reasons for public ownership. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) asked a question, had a knock at the coal industry and cleared off. That is about it. Before the war, Imperial Airways was a publicly owned body. It was publicly owned—as I knew from my six years' service with the Royal Air Force—for a very good reason. There was a strategic link with the Gulf. Gas and electricity were nationalised for great technical rather than political reasons. The coal industry was a dead loss. Anyone who believes that it was a thriving industry should ask those who worked in it. The Germans nationalised their railways 100 years before us and Gladstone had a shot at nationalisation at least 140 years ago. The Conservative Party took Rolls-Royce into public ownership. It has not been nationalised and I do not know how it is run. It is never discussed in the House. No one should expect me to say that British Leyland is a great success and to genuflect towards it simply because it is 100 per cent. publicly owned.

There needs to be discussion about the public sector borrowing requirement, and so on. Now that the Government are following a policy of privatisation, we need to ask ourselves what is to happen if Britoil remains 49 per cent. publicly owned. It is useful to have 49 per cent. of the profits coming into the Treasury. There are various definitions of PSBR. I could put forward an argument for 51 per cent. public ownership. There will not be any real discussion as to how the firm will be run. We have argued that the pension funds should be used in industry. There will be a great deal of argument about that in the years to come, because that is where the capital comes from. It does not come from the little chaps who

are running around buying shares. There are 50,000 or 60,000 small shareholders in the country. If I hold shares, I suppose that I do so through insurance funds.

The idea of a voluntary timetable is a very good one. I remember what happened the last time we had minority Government. If the press is right—usually it is wrong—we might well be moving into a period of minority Government. In those circumstances, it is perfectly respectable to argue about the use of time, but it is not respectable in relation to a Bill of this nature.

We cannot ignore the policy of privatisation, which is part of the general policy of the Government. The Government have had approval of the Bill on Second Reading and they have every right to protect the legislative programme. Right from the beginning, the assumption was that at a certain time we would move to a guillotine. That is what we have all said when we have had a cup of tea outside the Committee Room.

The Minister of State answered questions very fully. If I had answered questions at that length when I was a junior Minister, senior Ministers would have told me to shut up. They would have said "It is not your job to open up every aspect of every question." I congratulate the Minister on the way in which he answered questions. Only once did he get involved in trumpeting about what he thought the Opposition really believed in, and that took only about two minutes. He joined my hon. Friends in debating Scottish matters, such as the smelter at Invergordon. That was perfectly proper, because they were important issues. Never once did the Government try to curtail discussion. Never once did they move the closure. If I had been leading in the Committee I would have moved the closure—and moved it quickly. When the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Skeet) moved the closure, the Government voted against it. The best thing that could have happened would have been to have a closure.

The nature of the Bill was revealed on Second Reading, when I suggested that there would be a long Committee stage. I asked for information on BNOC and British Gas. I believe that last Wednesday several hon. Members had a useful briefing from British Gas, and that BNOC also provided information. The Minister of State promised that he would give us a bundle of information about safety factors in the North Sea, but we have not had it. [Interruption.] Apparently, it is on its way, now that we have the guillotine. It was not available previously. We require a great deal of information on safety. I talked about a safety charter. It is a very important question, especially in view of the nasty Canadian accident. We have to find a means of giving the question a great deal of time.

We have emphasised the lack of satisfactory parliamentary procedure. Where there is accountability, it is done by negative resolution. I have argued that point in Committee, so I shall not go through it again.

We were given no information about the sale of the oil interests of British Gas. We were told that the Government do not yet have the information. If the British Gas Corporation or BNOC act in such a way that the Secretary of State does not have to intervene, there will be no further procedure in any shape or form. [Interruption.] It is suggested that the articles of association do not matter, but when industries are taken into public ownership there are provisions in the relevant Bills for the way in which the industries are to be organised.

With regard to the splitting up of BNOC, we were informed that there was near unanimity in the advice to

keep an integrated firm. We were told that the merchant banks advised it. We were told about the crucial need for the effectiveness of the trading arm. We have not had any real explanation of these matters. We were told that the Government had changed their mind on the membership of the trading arm during the passage of the Bill.

We made a meal of the articles of association, and well we might have, because they should have been supplied earlier. We have got them now that we have finished the discussion of the part of the Bill dealing with oil. We have one and a half days for discussion on the Floor of the House.

How is the firm to be controlled? I have not the faintest idea of the role of the Government directors. I have not the faintest idea what the two chaps do on BP. If they are there with their fiduciary responsibility, what are they supposed to do? They are appointed by the Government. There were special aspects of the De Lorean venture, in which I am interested, in view of my past knowledge of Belfast. There are things that I would have done in a different way, but it has to be remembered that at one end of Belfast there were people who had never worked in their lives.

The Secretary of State says that he wants to keep Britoil British. We have not heard very much about how that is to be done. His words on Second Reading could mean one thing or another, but apparently the problem relates to the law and to the EEC.

The Secretary of State has said that he is not sorry about the way in which he sold Amersham International. Incidentally, I think that it is a good idea to let the people employed in the firm have shares. In the case of British Aerospace, there was a speculative gain of 10 per cent., with Cable and Wireless there was a gain of 20 per cent. With Amersham it was a 30 per cent. gain. With Britoil, a 10 per cent. error could be worth £150 million. Therefore, it is perfectly proper for this House to discuss the method of selling.

If the Government want to have privatisation, it is not something to be discussed simply on the back pages of the *Financial Times*. It is not sufficient to give vague supplementary figures. What on earth is the use of that sort of information? As I said in Committee, there are people on my side of the divide in politics who say "We can nationalise with a one-clause Bill. We do not need parliamentary procedure."

We have no information as to the date of sale. I suppose that the Secretary of State has to box clever on that, but if the Government are to proceed with privatisation, the Bank of England—which is the national bank, in a curious sense of the term—should have a small merchant bank attached to it. It would be very much better if such a bank were to handle the matter. I am not particularly interested in arguing about who gets money from whom. We know that the City puts a lot of money into the Conservative Party. We know that centrally the Labour Party gets money from the trade unions. But it would be better for the body politic if the people who pay money into the Conservative Party were not involved in this Bill. The Conservative Party would be the first to jump in if the trade unions were involved. The matter is picked up by people outside the House who build it up into something that it is not. We should also examine that matter.

I would have been quite happy, as would my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline (Mr. Douglas), who has played a leading part in running the Bill, to discuss from the beginning how we would sort it out. I believed

that it needed a Select Committee procedure. The guillotine motion or the discussion today should not be just another party game. The Government are selling off a successful oil company which in its integrated form can, as the Canadian company, talk to foreign Governments. I accept fully that the major role in North Sea oil extraction has been played by foreign oil companies which have brought their expertise to Britain. They have trained people in Scotland. In the few times that I have been to Aberdeen, I have seen that those companies play a major part. However, the Government are funding the training at BNOC in a different way from that envisaged in the original Bill.

The gas corporation has been a successful monopoly. It is an integrated company which is the envy of the world. The chairman of another nationalised industry—I use the word "nationalised" advisedly—said that the Government have a vendetta against nationalised industry. If I have said that before it is because the matter is on my mind. I lunched recently with a French banker and a German banker who have come to live in Britain. They are astonished that the national sport is knocking the public sector. I understand that when trains are late people say "It is a nationalised industry". However, unless we put our minds to the running of the nationalised industries, the way the capital is injected into them and the management training, they will not add to anyone's comfort.

The large private monopolies are similarly internally to the nationalised undertakings. As I said in the debate a few months ago, I do not genuflect as I pass Hobart House or the headquarters of the CEEB, and I do not regard those companies as "Socialism" in the modern sense of the word. They are State monopolies which we should examine and question in exactly the same way as private monopolies.

Mr. Garel-Jones: What about your reselection?

Mr. Rees: I have been reselected with no other nominations. I have said these things up hill and down dale. The people who work in those industries know that I am talking sense and vote accordingly.

We have spent three hours on the guillotine motion. We could have done it in a different way. There is much expertise on the Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline has great knowledge of the oil industry and adds stature to the Committee. I am against the motion because what the Government seek could have been achieved in another way, but I shall not join in the ritual game of saying that guillotine motions are always wrong. They are sometimes right. We could have had a sensible discussion on the matters. However, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the motion, for what good it will do them.

6.23 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Nigel Lawson): The right hon. Member for Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has addressed the House in the thoughtful and moderate tones to which we have become accustomed in Committee. It was a welcome contrast to the synthetic indignation to which we were treated at the beginning of the debate by the right hon. Member for Deptford (Mr. Silkin). One point made by the right hon. Member for Leeds, South corrected a totally false impression given by the right hon. Member for Deptford when he accused the

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Government Front Bench—my hon. Friend the Minister of State has carried most of the heavy burden in Committee—of taking up too much time. That is nonsense. Time was taken because careful answers were being given to genuine points put by the Opposition Front Bench and Opposition Back Benchers. Not to do that would make a farce of the Committee stage. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will withdraw any charge—

Mr. John Silkin: If the Secretary of State reads *Hansard* to morrow he will find that that is exactly what I said.

Mr. Lawson: I am aware of the charge that the right hon. Gentleman made, but it has been answered by his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, South.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, South also referred, perhaps in a musing or philosophical way, to the difficulty that the House always has when debating commercial and financial matters. There is a difficulty. Even if industries remain wholly State owned, we cannot run them in Parliament. It would be absurd to try to do so, yet we have genuine concerns about the way in which they are run and their effect upon the national economy. One reason behind our preference to have as many industries in the private sector as possible, and exposed to competition wherever possible, is the acute difficulty, even with the best will in the world, of achieving some sort of political framework for the essential commercial, industrial and financial decisions.

That the Bill is of the first importance has been agreed by hon. Members on both sides of the House on many occasions, not least today. The Opposition have made it clear that they intend to oppose the Bill by every means within their power. One may recall what was said by the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) when he spoke from the Dispatch Box for the official Opposition on the one occasion that I can remember during this Parliamentary session.

The right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Government's proposals . . . will be bitterly resisted by the Labour Party and the trade union movement, both inside and outside Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1981; Vol. 12, c. 494.]

The means available include delay, which, given its head, could prevent the Bill from coming on to the statute book. No Government could possibly accept that.

The right hon. Member for Deptford said that we were incompetent because we did not have the Second Reading until 19 January. The equivalent measure, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said—the Petroleum and Submarine Pipe-lines Act 1975—did not have its Second Reading until 30 April. That was guillotined. The right hon. Gentleman said that we had introduced the guillotine on this Bill when the progress made was far too rapid to justify a guillotine. I have considered what we are doing. In 70 hours of discussion we have discussed only 11 of the 36 clauses, which is about 30 per cent. For the Petroleum and Submarine Pipe-lines measure a guillotine was introduced after only 60 hours of debate during which 19 clauses had been completed—40 per cent. of the Bill—which was much greater progress. By the yardstick of what the right hon. Gentleman did when in office and the guillotine on the 1975 Bill, we have allowed much more time and waited longer before deciding that it was inevitable, sadly, that a guillotine should be introduced.

The guillotine motion on the Petroleum and Submarine Pipe-lines Bill was proposed not by the then Leader of the House but by the Secretary of State for Energy, the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East. He said that

"the case for timetable motions on the part of whatever Government happen to be in power is that, where a major Bill in the main programme is likely to be lost through undue delay . . . for whatever reason, the Government are bound to turn their mind to means by which the Bill can be brought back to the Floor of the House to have its Report and Third Reading."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1975; Vol. 895, c. 112-13.]

That is the argument that always applies. It was a fair argument then, as it is now. It is sheer hypocrisy to chop and change and to say that we cannot possibly have a guillotine because it is a defiance of all that this Parliament stands for.

Opposition Members have sought to inject a new element into the debate. Among those who have done so is the right hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Mabon) who made great play of the fact that, somehow or other, debate is rendered impossible because Britoil's articles of association will not be available to the Committee until later this week. That does not begin to stand up to a moment's examination. Most of the issues in the amendments tabled by the Opposition have nothing to do with the contents of the articles of association. The amendments deal with the way in which the scheme-making powers will be used, the valuation of Britoil and BNOC assets, the way in which parliamentary accountability can be satisfied, BNOC's capital structure after privatisation, and wider matters such as the implications for employment in Scotland and the merits of participation agreements.

Those and other matters have been the subjects of Opposition amendments. I make no complaint, but Britoil's articles of association have no bearing whatever on such matters. I explained clearly on Second Reading the provisions on control, so that objection does not stand up to examination.

A number of Opposition Members have suggested that it would be better to have a voluntary timetable from the beginning or from an early stage. I hope that hon. Members who are in favour of timetable motions will behave logically and support the timetable motion in the Lobby.

In view of one or two exchanges earlier on the question of a voluntary timetable, I remind hon. Members of the Committee's all-night sitting on 23 February. We began at 4.30 in the afternoon and did not finish until 7.20 the following morning. It was a long and arduous all-night sitting. We tried to make progress but we made very little and got through only two-and-a-half clauses. During the night the right hon. Member for Leeds, South came to me in the Corridor and said "Is this not a lot of nonsense? Can we not do without an all-night sitting?" I said "We can do without an all-night sitting provided that you can give me a date for the ending of the Committee stage." He said that he could not do that. That was fair. I made him the offer, and the opportunity for a voluntary timetable was there.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: But then I said "Is this not a daft way of discussing the Bill? Can we not finish at 2 am or 3 am?" I could not, in the middle of the night give the right hon. Gentleman a finishing date. If he had made a suggestion I could have contacted my hon. Friends and discussed it the following day. We were not discussing a

voluntary timetable. I was asking whether it was possible to finish at 2 am or 3 am instead of sitting all night. We could have done that with the same results.

Mr. Lawson: The fact is that the right hon. Gentleman did not respond to the offer. I know that it was difficult for him because of his difficulty in controlling his hon. Friends. That was evident in the Committee. I understand why he did not respond, but the offer was made.

The Committee has been good humoured. Hon. Members on both sides have testified to that. It is wholly satisfactory and I am happy that that is how it has been, but all good things must come to an end—even Standing Committee E. The Bill must be put on the statute book. In the motion we offer a fair and reasonable timetable. It allows reasonable time not just for a continuation of the discussion on the gas provisions, but for discussion on the important safety provisions for operations in the North Sea. It is important that they should be discussed, and the timetable arrangement will enable that.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline (Mr. Douglas) knows how I hate to omit to mention him, because he plays such a large part in our counsels upstairs. He suggests that the Bill is not needed at present because falling oil prices mean that we shall no longer want to go ahead with the privatisation of Britoil. I disagree. It is essential to be able to sell the shares in Britoil whenever the market conditions are right. We must achieve fair value for the taxpayer. There is no case for delay, nor is there a case for going slow on the breaking up of the monopoly and monopsony of the British Gas Corporation, because they are contrary to the interest of the British economy, British industry and the British people.

We are talking about value to the taxpayer. Some of my hon. Friends mentioned the sale of a large shareholding in British Petroleum by the last Government. The value of that company moved up substantially from what the Government received. In 1977, when that happened, the difference was £50 million—or £90 million at today's prices. Silence on that matter by Opposition Members might be sensible.

I am sure that Opposition Members do not wish to delay the implementation of the vital safety provisions. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has given details of the slow progress in Standing Committee E, in spite of the good spirit and good humoured nature of our debates and some of the good points made by Opposition Members. We had high hopes of making satisfactory progress without a guillotine, but our hopes were disappointed, as anybody who attended the Committee will appreciate.

Anybody who heard the engaging speech today by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Hardy), a member of the Committee, will understand even more vividly why we need a guillotine if we are to conclude proceedings on the Bill.

I do not complain for a moment that the Opposition are not doing their job properly. They are in favour of monopoly and the State ownership of industry. They believe it right to put their views forward. They believe that they should oppose private enterprise, private initiative and competition. However, there must be a limit in time to the expression of their opposition. They have made it clear that they would prefer the Bill to be lost. We should have liked to complete the Committee stage by now, but we accept that we cannot have everything our own way. We must strike a balance between the two

views. We have already debated the Bill in Committee for the best part of 70 hours. The further time allocated in the motion brings the time to about 110 hours. That is a reasonable compromise by any standards. I hope, therefore, that the House will accept the motion.

We have heard a great deal of synthetic indignation from the Shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Deptford. He was conspicuously deserted by his Back Benchers. Indeed, the Opposition Benches have been pretty well empty throughout the debate. That tells its own story far more clearly than any words of mine, or of anybody else. I commend the motion to the House. I hope and believe that from now on we shall be able to scrutinise the Bill's remaining provisions properly and fully, as we were elected to do.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 284, Noes 226.

Division No. 84]

[6.40 pm

AYES

| | |
|--|---|
| Adley, Robert | Dickens, Geoffrey |
| Aitken, Jonathan | Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J. |
| Alexander, Richard | Dover, Denshore |
| Alison, Rt Hon Michael | du Cann, Rt Hon Edward |
| Amery, Rt Hon Julian | Dunn, Robert (<i>Dartford</i>) |
| Aspinwall, Jack | Durant, Tony |
| Atkins, Robert (<i>Preston N</i>) | Dykes, Hugh |
| Baker, Kenneth (<i>St. M'bone</i>) | Eden, Rt Hon Sir John |
| Baker, Nicholas (<i>N Dorset</i>) | Edwards, Rt Hon N. (<i>P' broke</i>) |
| Banks, Robert | Eggar, Tim |
| Beaumont-Dark, Anthony | Elliott, Sir William |
| Bendall, Vivian | Eyre, Reginald |
| Bennett, Sir Frederic (<i>T' bay</i>) | Fairbairn, Nicholas |
| Benyon, Thomas (<i>A' don</i>) | Fairgrieve, Sir Russell |
| Benyon, W. (<i>Buckingham</i>) | Faith, Mrs Sheila |
| Berry, Hon Anthony | Farr, John |
| Best, Keith | Fell, Sir Anthony |
| Biffen, Rt Hon John | Finsberg, Geoffrey |
| Biggs-Davison, Sir John | Fisher, Sir Nigel |
| Blackburn, John | Fletcher, A. (<i>Ed' nb' gh N</i>) |
| Body, Richard | Fletcher-Cooke, Sir Charles |
| Bonsor, Sir Nicholas | Fookes, Miss Janet |
| Bottomley, Peter (<i>W' wich W</i>) | Forman, Nigel |
| Boyson, Dr Rhodes | Fowler, Rt Hon Norman |
| Braine, Sir Bernard | Fox, Marcus |
| Bright, Graham | Fraser, Rt Hon Sir Hugh |
| Brinton, Tim | Fraser, Peter (<i>South Angus</i>) |
| Brittan, Rt. Hon. Leon | Fry, Peter |
| Brooke, Hon Peter | Gardiner, George (<i>Reigate</i>) |
| Brotherton, Michael | Gardner, Edward (<i>S Fylde</i>) |
| Brown, Michael (<i>Brigg & Sc'n</i>) | Garel-Jones, Tristan |
| Bruce-Gardyne, John | Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian |
| Bryan, Sir Paul | Goodhart, Sir Philip |
| Buchanan-Smith, Rt. Hon. A. | Goodhew, Sir Victor |
| Buck, Antony | Goodlad, Alastair |
| Budgen, Nick | Gow, Ian |
| Bulmer, Esmond | Grant, Anthony (<i>Harrow C</i>) |
| Burden, Sir Frederick | Gray, Hamish |
| Butcher, John | Greenway, Harry |
| Cadbury, Jocelyn | Griffiths, Peter (<i>Portsm'th N</i>) |
| Carlisle, John (<i>Luton West</i>) | Grist, Ian |
| Carlisle, Kenneth (<i>Lincoln</i>) | Grylls, Michael |
| Chalker, Mrs. Lynda | Gummer, John Selwyn |
| Channon, Rt. Hon. Paul | Hamilton, Hon A. |
| Clark, Hon A. (<i>Plym'th, S'n</i>) | Hamilton, Michael (<i>Salisbury</i>) |
| Clark, Sir W. (<i>Croydon S</i>) | Hampson, Dr Keith |
| Clarke, Kenneth (<i>Rushcliffe</i>) | Hannam, John |
| Clegg, Sir Walter | Haselhurst, Alan |
| Cockeram, Eric | Hastings, Stephen |
| Cope, John | Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael |
| Cormack, Patrick | Hawkins, Paul |
| Corrie, John | Hawksley, Warren |
| Costain, Sir Albert | Hayhoe, Barney |
| Cranborne, Viscount | Heath, Rt Hon Edward |
| Critchley, Julian | Heddle, John |
| Crouch, David | Henderson, Barry |
| Dean, Paul (<i>North Somerset</i>) | Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael |

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|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L. | Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil | Watson, John | Young, Sir George (<i>Acton</i>) |
| Hill, James | Parris, Matthew | Wells, John (<i>Maidstone</i>) | Younger, Rt Hon George |
| Hogg, Hon Douglas (<i>Gr'th'm</i>) | Patten, Christopher (<i>Bath</i>) | Wheeler, John | |
| Holland, Philip (<i>Carlton</i>) | Patten, John (<i>Oxford</i>) | Whitney, Raymond | Tellers for the Ayes: |
| Hooson, Tom | Pattie, Geoffrey | Wickenden, Keith | Mr. Robert Boscawen and |
| Hordern, Peter | Pawsey, James | Wiggin, Jerry | Mr. Carol Mather. |
| Howell, Rt Hon D. (<i>G'ldf'd</i>) | Percival, Sir Ian | Wolfson, Mark | |
| Howell, Ralph (<i>NNorfolk</i>) | Peyton, Rt Hon John | | |
| Hunt, David (<i>Wirral</i>) | Pollock, Alexander | | |
| Hunt, John (<i>Ravensbourne</i>) | Porter, Barry | Allaun, Frank | NOES |
| Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas | Prentice, Rt Hon Reg | Alton, David | Foster, Derek |
| Irving, Charles (<i>Cheltenham</i>) | Price, Sir David (<i>Eastleigh</i>) | Anderson, Donald | Fraser, J. (<i>Lamb'th, N'w'd</i>) |
| Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick | Proctor, K. Harvey | Archer, Rt Hon Peter | Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald |
| JohnsonSmith, Geoffrey | Pym, Rt Hon Francis | Ashley, Rt Hon Jack | Freud, Clement |
| Jopling, Rt Hon Michael | Raison, Rt Hon Timothy | Ashton, Joe | Garrett, John (<i>Norwich S</i>) |
| Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith | Rathbone, Tim | Atkinson, N. (<i>H'gey,</i>) | Garrett, W. E. (<i>Wallsend</i>) |
| Kaberry, Sir Donald | Rees, Peter (<i>Dover and Deal</i>) | Bagier, Gordon A. T. | George, Bruce |
| Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine | Rees-Davies, W. R. | Barnett, Guy (<i>Greenwich</i>) | Golding, John |
| Kimball, Sir Marcus | Renton, Tim | Barnett, Rt Hon Joel (<i>H'wd</i>) | Graham, Ted |
| King, Rt Hon Tom | Rhodes James, Robert | Benn, Rt Hon Tony | Grant, George (<i>Morpeth</i>) |
| Kitson, Sir Timothy | Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon | Bennett, Andrew (<i>St'kp'tN</i>) | Hamilton, James (<i>Bothwell</i>) |
| Knight, Mrs Jill | Ridley, Hon Nicholas | Bidwell, Sydney | Hamilton, W. W. (<i>C'tral Fife</i>) |
| Knox, David | Ridsdale, Sir Julian | Booth, Rt Hon Albert | Hardy, Peter |
| Lamont, Norman | Rifkind, Malcolm | Boothroyd, Miss Betty | Harrison, Rt Hon Walter |
| Lang, Ian | Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey | Bottomley, Rt Hon A. (<i>M'b'ro</i>) | Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith |
| Langford-Holt, Sir John | Roberts, Wyn (<i>Conway</i>) | Bradley, Tom | Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy |
| Latham, Michael | Rossi, Hugh | Bray, Dr Jeremy | Haynes, Frank |
| Lawrence, Ivan | Rost, Peter | Brocklebank-Fowler, C. | Heffer, Eric S. |
| Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel | Royle, Sir Anthony | Brown, Hugh D. (<i>Provan</i>) | Hogg, N. (<i>EDunb't'nshire</i>) |
| Lee, John | St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N. | Brown, Ron (<i>E'burgh, Leith</i>) | Holland, S. (<i>L'b'th, Vauxh'II</i>) |
| LeMarchant, Spencer | Scott, Nicholas | Callaghan, Rt Hon J. | HomeRobertson, John |
| Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark | Shaw, Giles (<i>Pudsey</i>) | Callaghan, Jim (<i>Midd't'n & P</i>) | Homewood, William |
| Lester, Jim (<i>Beeston</i>) | Shaw, Michael (<i>Scarborough</i>) | Campbell, Ian | Horam, John |
| Lewis, Kenneth (<i>Rutland</i>) | Shelton, William (<i>Streatham</i>) | Campbell-Savours, Dale | Howell, Rt Hon D. |
| Lloyd, Ian (<i>Havant & W'loo</i>) | Shepherd, Colin (<i>Hereford</i>) | Carmichael, Neil | Hoyle, Douglas |
| Lloyd, Peter (<i>Fareham</i>) | Shepherd, Richard | Carter-Jones, Lewis | Huckfield, Les |
| Loveridge, John | Shersby, Michael | Clark, Dr David (<i>S Shields</i>) | Hughes, Mark (<i>Durham</i>) |
| Luce, Richard | Silvester, Fred | Cocks, Rt Hon M. (<i>B'stol S</i>) | Hughes, Robert (<i>Aberdeen N</i>) |
| Lyell, Nicholas | Sims, Roger | Cohen, Stanley | Hughes, Roy (<i>Newport</i>) |
| Macfarlane, Neil | Skeet, T. H. H. | Coleman, Donald | Janner, Hon Greenville |
| MacGregor, John | Speed, Keith | Conlan, Bernard | Jay, Rt Hon Douglas |
| Macmillan, Rt Hon M. | Speller, Tony | Cook, Robin F. | John, Brynmor |
| McNair-Wilson, M. (<i>N'bury</i>) | Spence, John | Cowans, Harry | Johnson, James (<i>Hull West</i>) |
| McNair-Wilson, P. (<i>New F'st</i>) | Spicer, Jim (<i>West Dorset</i>) | Craig, J. M. (<i>G'gow, M'hill</i>) | Johnson, Walter (<i>Derby S</i>) |
| McQuarrie, Albert | Spicer, Michael (<i>S Worcs</i>) | Crowther, Stan | Johnston, Russell (<i>Inverness</i>) |
| Madel, David | Sproat, Iain | Cryer, Bob | Jones, Rt Hon Alec (<i>Rh'dda</i>) |
| Major, John | Squire, Robin | Cunliffe, Lawrence | Jones, Barry (<i>East Flint</i>) |
| Marland, Paul | Stainton, Keith | Cunningham, Dr J. (<i>W'h'n</i>) | Jones, Dan (<i>Burnley</i>) |
| Marlow, Antony | Stanbrook, Ivor | Dalyell, Tam | Kerr, Russell |
| Marshall, Michael (<i>Arundel</i>) | Stanley, John | Davidson, Arthur | Kilroy-Silk, Robert |
| Mates, Michael | Steen, Anthony | Davis, Clinton (<i>Hackney C</i>) | Lamborn, Harry |
| Mawby, Ray | Stevens, Martin | Davis, Terry (<i>B'ham, Stechf'd</i>) | Lamond, James |
| Mawhinney, Dr Brian | Stewart, A. (<i>ERenfrewshire</i>) | Dean, Joseph (<i>Leeds West</i>) | Leadbitter, Ted |
| Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin | Stewart, Ian (<i>Hitchin</i>) | Dixon, Donald | Leighton, Ronald |
| Mayhew, Patrick | Stokes, John | Dobson, Frank | Lestor, Miss Joan |
| Mellor, David | Tapsell, Peter | Dormand, Jack | Lewis, Arthur (<i>N'ham NW</i>) |
| Meyer, Sir Anthony | Taylor, Teddy (<i>S'end E</i>) | Douglas, Dick | Lewis, Ron (<i>Carlisle</i>) |
| Miller, Hal (<i>B'grove</i>) | Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman | Douglas-Mann, Bruce | Litherland, Robert |
| Mills, Iain (<i>Meriden</i>) | Temple-Morris, Peter | Dubs, Alfred | Lofthouse, Geoffrey |
| Miscampbell, Norman | Thomas, Rt Hon Peter | Duffy, A. E. P. | Lyon, Alexander (<i>York</i>) |
| Mitchell, David (<i>Basingstoke</i>) | Thompson, Donald | Dunlop, John | Lyons, Edward (<i>Bradf'd W</i>) |
| Moate, Roger | Thorne, Neil (<i>Ilford South</i>) | Dunn, James A. | Mabon, Rt Hon Dr J. Dickson |
| Montgomery, Fergus | Thornton, Malcolm | Dunnett, Jack | McCartney, Hugh |
| Moore, John | Townend, John (<i>Bridlington</i>) | Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G. | McDonald, Dr Oonagh |
| Morgan, Geraint | Townsend, Cyril D. (<i>B'heath</i>) | Eadie, Alex | McElhone, Frank |
| Morrison, Hon C. (<i>Devizes</i>) | Trippier, David | Eastham, Ken | McKay, Allen (<i>Penistone</i>) |
| Morrison, Hon P. (<i>Chester</i>) | Trotter, Neville | Ellis, R. (<i>NE D'bysh're</i>) | McKelvey, William |
| Mudd, David | van Straubenzee, Sir W. | Ellis, Tom (<i>Wrexham</i>) | MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor |
| Murphy, Christopher | Vaughan, Dr Gerard | English, Michael | MacLennan, Robert |
| Myles, David | Viggers, Peter | Ennals, Rt Hon David | McMahon, Andrew |
| Neale, Gerrard | Waddington, David | Evans, Ioan (<i>Aberdare</i>) | McNamara, Kevin |
| Needham, Richard | Waldegrave, Hon William | Evans, John (<i>Newton</i>) | McTaggart, Robert |
| Nelson, Anthony | Walker, Rt Hon P. (<i>W'cester</i>) | Ewing, Harry | McWilliam, John |
| Neubert, Michael | Walker, B. (<i>Perth</i>) | Faulds, Andrew | Marks, Kenneth |
| Newton, Tony | Walker-Smith, Rt Hon Sir D. | Field, Frank | Marshall, D (<i>G'gow S'ton</i>) |
| Normanton, Tom | Wall, Sir Patrick | Flannery, Martin | Marshall, Jim (<i>Leicester S</i>) |
| Onslow, Cranley | Waller, Gary | Fletcher, Ted (<i>Darlington</i>) | Martin, M (<i>G'gow S'burn</i>) |
| Osborn, John | Walters, Dennis | Foot, Rt Hon Michael | Mason, Rt Hon Roy |
| Page, John (<i>Harrow, West</i>) | Ward, John | Ford, Ben | Maxton, John |
| Page, Richard (<i>SW Herts</i>) | Warren, Kenneth | Forrester, John | Maynard, Miss Joan |
| | | | Meacher, Michael |

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mellish, Rt Hon Robert | Short, Mrs Renée |
| Mikardo, Ian | Silkin, Rt Hon J. (Deptford) |
| Millan, Rt Hon Bruce | Silverman, Julius |
| Mitchell, Austin (Grimsby) | Skinner, Dennis |
| Mitchell, R. C. (Soton Itchen) | Smith, Rt Hon J. (N Lanark) |
| Morris, Rt Hon A. (W'shawe) | Snape, Peter |
| Morris, Rt Hon C. (O'shaw) | Soley, Clive |
| Mulley, Rt Hon Frederick | Spriggs, Leslie |
| Newens, Stanley | Stallard, A. W. |
| O'Halloran, Michael | Stoddart, David |
| O'Neill, Martin | Stott, Roger |
| Orme, Rt Hon Stanley | Straw, Jack |
| Palmer, Arthur | Taylor, Mrs Ann (Bolton W) |
| Park, George | Thomas, Dafydd (Merioneth) |
| Parker, John | Thomas, Jeffrey (Abertillery) |
| Parry, Robert | Thomas, Dr R. (Carmarthen) |
| Pavitt, Laurie | Thorne, Stan (Preston South) |
| Pendry, Tom | Tilley, John |
| Penhaligon, David | Tinn, James |
| Pitt, William Henry | Torney, Tom |
| Powell, Rt Hon J.E. (S Down) | Varley, Rt Hon Eric G. |
| Powell, Raymond (Ogmore) | Wainwright, E. (Dearne V) |
| Price, C. (Lewisham W) | Wainwright, R. (Colne V) |
| Race, Reg | Walker, Rt Hon H. (D'caster) |
| Radice, Giles | Weetch, Ken |
| Rees, Rt Hon M (Leeds S) | Wellbeloved, James |
| Richardson, Jo | Welsh, Michael |
| Roberts, Albert (Normanton) | Whitlock, William |
| Roberts, Allan (Bootle) | Wigley, Dafydd |
| Roberts, Ernest (Hackney N) | Willey, Rt Hon Frederick |
| Roberts, Gwilym (Cannock) | Williams, Rt Hon A. (S'sea W) |
| Robertson, George | Williams, Rt Hon Mrs (Crosby) |
| Robinson, G. (Coventry NW) | Wilson, Gordon (Dundee E) |
| Rodgers, Rt Hon William | Wilson, Rt Hon Sir H. (H'ton) |
| Rooker, J. W. | Wilson, William (C'try SE) |
| Roper, John | Winnick, David |
| Ross, Ernest (Dundee West) | Woodall, Alec |
| Rowlands, Ted | Woolmer, Kenneth |
| Ryman, John | Wright, Sheila |
| Sandelson, Neville | Young, David (Bolton E) |
| Sever, John | |
| Sheerman, Barry | Tellers for the Noes: |
| Sheldon, Rt Hon R. | Mr. George Morton and |
| Shore, Rt Hon Peter | Dr. Edmund Marshall. |

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 23rd March 1982.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 23rd March may continue until Eleven p.m., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 24th March 1982.

Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at seven o'clock on the second of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 43 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House their Resolutions as to the proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than the fourth day on which the House sits after the day on which the Chairman of the Standing Committee reports the Bill to the House.

(3) The resolutions in any Report made under Standing Order No. 43 may be varied by a further Report so made, whether or not within the time specified in sub-paragraph (2) above, and whether or not the Resolutions have been agreed to by the House.

(4) The Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in the order in which proceedings on Consideration of the Bill are taken.

Procedure in Standing Committee

3.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be moved in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

4. No Motion shall be moved to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and New Schedules are to be taken in the Standing Committee but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

5. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be moved in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on first allotted days

7.—(1) On the first allotted day paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for two hours after Ten o'clock.

(2) Any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 9 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the said period of two hours.

(3) If the first allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 stands over from an earlier day, a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings upon that Motion shall be added to the said period of two hours.

Private business

8. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

9.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others), that is to say—

- any Question already proposed from the Chair;
- any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);
- the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment or Motion is moved by a Member of the Government;
- any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so moved for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Homeless Persons (Report)

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) will, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

10. — (1) The proceedings on any Motion moved in the House by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion moved at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

11. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution, or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Re-committal

12. — (1) References in this Order to proceedings on Consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings, at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of re-committal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to re-commit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

13. In this Order—

“allotted day” means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day or is set down for consideration on that day;

“the Bill” means the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill;

“Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee” means a Resolution of the business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

“Resolution of the Business Committee” means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

6.50 pm

Mr. A. W. Stallard (St. Pancras, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask for guidance more than anything. In *The Guardian* today there is an article on the first major national report by a Government for 10 years on the problems of homelessness. I am the chairman of the all-party group for the homeless and rootless. We are concerned about the issues in the report.

Since I arrived at the House early today I have been trying to obtain a copy of the report. It is on sale in Her Majesty's Stationery Office, it has been reviewed in the press and people on the street have copies, but no hon. Member has one. There is not a copy in the House. I have been to the Vote Office, the Library, the general office and your office, Mr. Speaker. I filled in a green card. I could wait perhaps two weeks for the result. I have tried to explore every conceivable channel.

How can we do our job if we have to rely on second-hand reports in newspapers?

Mr. David Ennals (Norwich, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was the first chairman of the Campaign for the Homeless and Rootless. I followed the same route as my hon. Friend, and I, too, have been unable to obtain the report.

I understand that the report has been heavily edited and many of the recommendations have been excluded, so it is even more important to see what has finally been published.

Mr. David Stoddart (Swindon): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am interested in the subject. I recently had an Adjournment debate on it.

This is not the first time that we have had a problem with reports. Hon. Members are being treated as second-class citizens. We are sick and tired of being the last to see Government publications. You are the guardian of Back-Bench rights, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will put the Government in their place and tell them to do their job properly.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened with concern to the right hon. and two hon. Members. I shall look into the matter to see whether the papers can be made available. I believe that they will be. I do not know why they are not available already.

The Clerk will now proceed to read the Orders of the Day.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Bolton, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the Leader of the House is in the Chamber, perhaps it would be helpful if he could explain why the report has not been made available.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Clerk will now proceed to read the Orders of the Day.