

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME

This is the last year for heavyweight political legislation in this Parliament.

There are two notable omissions:

1. A Housing Bill. This morning, H Committee approved Patrick Jenkin's radical and exciting proposal to deregulate the private rented sector, subject to agreement between DoE and Treasury on who will pay the small, short-run cost. If all the work on housing policy is to bear fruit in this Parliament, it must be put into legislation in 1985-86.
2. A Bill to tackle privatisation in the energy industries: its absence will set back the whole privatisation and financial strategy;

Against this, the Programme Bill category has excess baggage.

The Bill on Latent Damage is a dull and uninspiring measure that could be left over to nearer an Election. Few people seem to be actively campaigning for it, and it has little political attraction.

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Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) will reopen a whole series of difficult issues. It is another one of those compromise Bills which leave the Government exposed from both sides - in this case from those who want greater liberality on sensitive civil rights issues, and from the Unionists and hard-liners who will resent any relaxation at all in Northern Ireland legal systems. It will however be thought important for Northern Ireland policy.

Scotland has two legal Bills - Legal Aid, and Law Reform Parent and Child. Couldn't the rationalisation of existing criminal and civil legal aid arrangements in Scotland be left over for a less political year? The need for Law Reform Parent and Child (Scotland) could also be questioned at this stage in a Parliament.

The Consumer Goods and Services Bill is imposing new duties and regulations on suppliers of goods, and involves some amendment to the Health and Safety at Work Act. We should not be adding a new regulatory measure just before launching a major deregulation drive. This Bill should be deleted, or left over.

In the uncontroversial category, there is also an opportunity to make more space. The very long Bill on Family and Matrimonial (Miscellaneous Provisions) will bog the House down for a considerable length of time. This, too, could be left over. It is also dubious whether it is a

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good idea to bring the British Council and Commonwealth Institute staff pensions into the Civil Service Scheme.

Conclusions

1. Go for a shorter, more political Programme that will advance the main causes of this Government.
2. Include a Housing Bill and a Bill to privatise energy industries. Less important, but useful; leave open a slot for a short Dockyards Bill to allow commercial management to be introduced (Michael Heseltine has been too preoccupied lately to clear this with colleagues).
3. Delete or hold over Latent Damage, Legal Aid Scotland, Law Reform Parent and Child Scotland, Consumer Goods and Services and Family and Matrimonial (Miscellaneous Provisions).
4. Consider whether Northern Ireland is a good idea in relation to NI policy and the political problems it will face.

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