



PRIME MINISTER

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REFORM OF SOCIAL SECURITY

I held a two-day meeting with DHSS Ministers and officials this week to discuss progress and next steps following the social security Green Paper.

Interest in our proposals has been sustained. The Green Paper has sold well: two volumes and the Housing Benefit Review Report have been reprinted. We expect the bulk of responses nearer the end of the consultation period, but we have already received a thousand. As you know, we are advertising the leaflet summarising the Green Paper this week; and I expect this to generate fresh interest.

Preparations for the White Paper and for the Bill to implement the changes that we have put forward are well in hand. I expect to have the White Paper ready by the middle of October and the Bill for presentation at the start of the new Session in November. Parliamentary Counsel has already drafted clauses to give effect to the majority of our proposals and instructions on all but one part of the rest are with him. There are no obvious obstacles to impede our progress or to delay this timetable.

Nor have reactions to the Green Paper proposals thrown up any new problems which are likely to prove overwhelming. We shall, obviously, have to consider substantive points raised during the consultations by the major representative bodies, but I hope that the informal discussions which we are having with a number of them will enable us to iron out differences which might otherwise have arisen between us. The two areas which I have identified as needing special attention are:

- the opposition which may come from the CBI about the pension proposals. It will be important to keep

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closely in touch with the CBI and other employer organisations;

- the attitude of the local authorities towards the changes in housing benefit. We shall have to rely heavily on their cooperation in getting those changes implemented on time.

I can certainly see no reason for our being deflected from our aim of introducing the social security changes in April 1987. Progress to date and in prospect suggests that this remains a realistic deadline.

I am copying this minute to Willie Whitelaw, John Biffen, John Wakeham and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

9 August 1985


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