

PRIME MINISTERPARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS

There are some important decisions to be taken about the handling of business during the Debate on the Address, but it will not be possible to take a firm view on it at Cabinet because we shall not know the Opposition's wishes about the subjects to be debated on each day of the Debate.

We are all anxious that we should not give the Opposition a further excuse for irresponsible behaviour in the House, not least because some of the legislation shortly to be introduced (and the National Insurance Bill in particular) will be highly controversial and will cause a great row anyway.

It follows that I hope you will ask colleagues to keep closely in touch with the Business Managers over the next few weeks, and indeed throughout the Session, about the timing and method of announcements. Another fuss very early in the new Session would be seriously damaging, and we must do everything we can to avoid it.

As far as the Debate on the Address itself is concerned, we have definite bids from the Minister of Agriculture to make a statement on this week's Fisheries Council, and from the Secretary of State for Employment to make a statement on the Government's new proposals on Special Employment Measures.

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* Chancellor's reply also attached ③
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Mr. Heseltine has reflected on what to do next, and his latest proposal (letter attached) ^{*} is that he might make a statement about local government finance generally, after the Chancellor has made his statement on the Government's economic and financial decisions. As I understand it, the Chancellor is still uncertain about whether to make a statement on Monday or to wait until his turn comes in the Debate on the Address - which might well be on Thursday 27 November, but could of course be earlier. If the Chancellor's announcement is very late in the Debate on the Address, then in my view Mr. Heseltine has no choice but to make an oral statement on his housing proposals before the

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Chancellor's announcement. The final element in the jigsaw is that the unemployment figures are published next Tuesday.

The Times has today fairly accurately foreshadowed your announcement in your speech and Mr. Prior's statement about Special Employment Measures.

Given the degree of uncertainty surrounding all this, I am sure that Cabinet would be well advised not to spend too much time discussing the various permutations. I hope that instead it will conclude that decisions should be reached in close consultation with the Business Managers; we can then bring any problems to you.

Having said all that, my own view is that the Chancellor should make an oral statement early next week, so as to avoid giving the Opposition an excuse to make trouble; and that, unless it is convenient for him to do it during the Debate, Mr Heseltine ought to make an oral statement later next week.

One possible solution to the problem would therefore be:-

- Thursday, 20 November : Queen's Speech
No Statements
- Friday, 21 November : Statement by Mr Prior on Special
Employment Measures
Statement by Mr Walker on Fisheries
Policy
- Monday, 24 November : Statement by Chancellor of the
Exchequer
- Tuesday, 25 November : No Statements (Unemployment Figures)
- Wednesday, 26 November : Statement by Mr Heseltine

MR HESELTINE
IS THINKING OF
A FULL-BLOODED

STATEMENT ON TUESDAY,
DESPITE THE ATMOSPHERE

THERE MAY BE IN THE HOUSE
MJS

MJS