
Editorial

The Queen's Speech

At the beginning of every Parliamentary session the Queen's Speech lays bare the Government's main legislative ambitions — or more accurately those that it sees fit to publicise. The preceding torrent of media speculation (fed by a mixture of Whitehall leaks and official policy statements) is supplanted by the authentic programme. The Speech, delivered on November 6, contained at least eighteen explicit promises of Government Bills, most of them items of high public importance: this is, whatever one's views about the nature of what is on offer, a remarkable tally given that a government entering its seventh year might be expected to have run out of ideas. On the other hand, it may also fairly be said that the programme is largely a set of variations upon some very familiar tunes. Thus the proposals that caught the most of the headlines were those to do with reform of the law on public order, with speculation about the likely legislative outcome of the DHSS's reviews of social security, and with the continuing saga of privatisation, with British Gas, the British Airports Authority and the management of the Royal dockyards the next in line for removal from the public sector.

The Speech makes unusually interesting

reading for all sectors of the business community. The operation of wages councils is to be reformed; the longstanding statutory right of employees to be paid in cash will be ended; building societies are to be allowed to take on additional functions; a fierce battle is in prospect over the proposed repeal of the Shops Act 1950 to permit Sunday trading. A new Financial Services Bill (based on the earlier White Paper, Cmnd 9432) promises a new statutory framework for the self-regulation of City institutions and for the protection of investors. Another Bill (also based on a recent White Paper, *Lifting the Burden*, Cmnd. 9571) will substantially reform the planning system with a view to encouraging the development of job creating businesses: the concept of the enterprise zone will be extended to a new species of planning area, the simplified planning zone.

Altering the statute book remains a crucial method of securing policy objectives, even though those policies may themselves have a strongly *laissez faire* flavour. The contents of this year's Queen's Speech strongly suggest that *Hansard* — as well as the actual texts of Bills and eventually (barring parliamentary accidents) of Acts themselves — will be essential reading for subscribers to this Review for many months to come.