

# Editorial

## The Queen's Speech

The Queen's Speech delivered on 6 May, setting out the Major Government's stall for the first, eighteen-month, session of the new Parliament contained no real surprises (apart, perhaps, from the omission from the list of 16 proposed Bills of an expected "green" measure to set up a new environmental protection agency). The absence of surprise is not at all surprising. The first session following an election takes place in the shadow of the winning party's manifesto, in which its main priorities have been set out for all to see. In any case, this Government's mission, and its mandate, is consolidation rather than revolution, with the promotion of improved and more consumer-sensitive public services very much to the fore: the Citizens' Charter, launched last summer (and the subject of an editorial in this *Review* last October) is to be, according to the Queen's Speech, "at the centre of decision making". To underline the point, William Waldegrave has been

shuffled sideways in Cabinet to oversee its implementation.

A European Communities (Amendment) Bill, to give legal effect to the Maastricht Agreement, will be enacted, barring unexpected accidents, before the UK takes over the EC presidency from Portugal on 1 July. There is to be an Employment Bill (the sixth industrial relations measure since 1979) which will, among other things, give effect to the Charter's promise to give the public the right to take civil action against those embarking on illegal public sector strikes. We are also promised a national lottery; and a new Urban Regeneration Agency, to be headed by former Cabinet minister, Peter Walker, overseen by the new Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Howard, which will involve the private sector in urban regeneration schemes.

Privatisation features prominently. There is to be a Bill to pave the way for the sale of the Coal Industry, though the exact form of sale (public flotation is the least likely option) has yet to be announced. And another that will set

the scene for partial privatisation of British Rail: the likely scenario here is sale of freight and parcel services, and the progressive transfer of passenger services to franchised private companies.

The 1990s will probably not be as exciting as the 1980s, except perhaps for quite a lot of people employed in the public sector. But with economic recovery (and a reduction in unemployment, upon which the Queen's Speech is disappointingly silent) heavily dependent upon the cultivation of renewed business confidence, who needs excitement?