CABINET

HOUSING POLICY

Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal

As requested by the Cabinet at its meeting on 16th April (C.C.(53) 27th Conclusions, Minute 3(4)) the Cabinet Committee on Housing Policy has considered the questions of procedure, tactics and timing in relation to the Parliamentary situation.

2. It would have been desirable to get the Rents Bill through Parliament this summer, partly in order to meet the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and partly because such a Bill is likely to be politically unpopular and should therefore be got rid of as early as possible. Time cannot, however, be found before the end of the Session for a Bill to deal with Scotland as well as one covering England and Wales, and it does not seem fair to deal with England and Wales but leave Scotland untouched. Moreover, there is a real danger that, if the Opposition adopt obstructive tactics, even one Bill might not be passed if it began so late in the present Session; in that event, the Government would find that it had stirred up a great deal of trouble without any results to show for it.

In the circumstances, the Committee recommends that there should be no Rents Bill this Session and that in its place the Government should introduce a Rating and Valuation Bill. Such a Bill is already in print. It is necessary because of the collapse of the 1948 Act, and must anyhow be introduced some time soon. Its interest is largely technical, and it would not arouse nearly as much political feeling as a Rents Bill. It could probably be passed through all its stages during the present Session, but it would not be a serious loss if the Government failed to do this.

3. If this change of plan is accepted, the Committee recommends that the following timing should be aimed at:

   (i) The Bill to be considered by the Legislation Committee in the week beginning 27th April.

   (ii) The Minister of Housing to discuss its provisions privately with the local authorities between then and 10th May.

   (iii) The Bill to be published on 8th May. By that time, the local elections will be finished, so that the publication of the Bill will have no effect on them. It will also leave two clear week-ends before the proposed date for the Second Reading.

   (iv) The Second Reading to take place between 10th May and the Whitsun Recess. The Chief Whip will do his best to find time for this, probably during the week beginning 18th May.
(v) The Bill to be taken in standing Committee between 10th June and 2nd July.

(vi) Report and Third Reading to be taken soon after 2nd July.

(vii) If the Lords cannot thereafter deal with the Bill before the summer Recess, it will suffice if they complete it in the autumn, at the tail end of the present Session.

4. On this assumption, with Rating out of the way the stage is set for bringing the "grand design" for housing before Parliament as a single whole as soon as possible in the new Session. The first draft of a White Paper on the whole subject should be brought before the Cabinet before the end of July. Selected members of the Conservative Party can be told in confidence of the Government's intentions at a suitable stage; and a Resolution can be arranged at the Conservative Party Conference, in reply to which the Government's plans can be adumbrated, though without disclosing the details of the White Paper. The White Paper should be published at the end of October, and can be discussed in the Debate on the Address. Thereafter, the necessary Bill or Bills can be introduced immediately: it would be best, if at all possible, to have the whole scheme in one Bill.

5. The Secretary of State for Scotland feels that some kind of enquiry into the rating system in Scotland is called for, and he proposes to announce its appointment at the same time as the Rating and Valuation Bill for England and Wales is published.

6. I invite my colleagues to agree:

(1) that the proposed Rents Bill should be dropped during the present Session and that a Rating and Valuation Bill should be introduced instead;

(2) that our aim should be to keep to the programme and timing outlined above;

(3) that the necessary legislation for the "grand design" should be introduced as early as possible in the new Session, preceded by the publication of a White Paper.

H.C.


24th April, 1953.