

Parliament
2
md

PRIME MINISTER

PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY COMMISSIONS: HANDLING OF REPORTS

The attached H paper by the Home Secretary sets out his proposals for the handling of the Boundary Commissions Reports. The timetable he envisages is as follows:-

November 1982	Northern Ireland Commission reports
January/February 1983	English, Scottish and Welsh Commissions report
April/May 1983	Orders are laid before the House and approved
June/July 1983	Necessary administrative steps to implement the proposals are taken (e.g. designation of Returning Officers, preparation of electoral registers, etc.)

This would of course enable the new boundaries to be in force for any election in the autumn of 1983.

Three factors could prejudice this timetable:-

- (i) After the Reports are laid the Home Secretary is obliged to consider any modifications proposed before Orders are laid before the House. The Home Secretary proposes that the draft Orders should be laid as soon as possible after the receipt of the Reports. But in the interim he will of course have to reply to all such representations.
- (ii) Parliamentary consideration. In 1970 the then Government gave effect to the proposals of the Commissions by means of one Order each for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 1954 the proposals were implemented by 52 Orders in Council. To follow the 1954 precedent would inevitably lengthen proceedings considerably. The Home Secretary therefore proposes to follow the 1970 precedent.

/(iii)

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

(iii) The Labour Party's possible legal challenge to the Commissions approach. The Commissions normally work on the basis that ~~equality of numbers~~ ^{local boundaries} in constituencies should take precedence over ~~community ties~~ ^{electoral equality} where these clash. Labour may argue that they have mis-directed themselves and that ~~community ties~~ ^{strict numerical equality} should take precedence. It is possible that this will prove inadmissible but should it be otherwise the whole timetable will be prejudiced.

JF.

21 October 1982