

**On The Opening Of Parliament**  
by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II  
Queen of the United Kingdom

Wednesday, 14th May, 1997

My Lords And Members Of The House Of Commons;

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to receiving State Visits by His Excellency the President of Brazil in December and by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan next year. We also look forward to our visit to Canada and to our State Visits to Pakistan and India.

My Government intends to govern for the benefit of the whole nation.

The education of young people will be my Government's first priority. They will work to raise standards in schools, colleges and universities and to promote lifelong learning at the workplace. They will cut class sizes using money saved as a result of legislation phasing out the assisted places scheme. A further Bill will contain measures to raise educational standards, develop a new role for local education authorities and parents, establish a new framework for the decentralised and equitable organisation of schools, propose reforms to the teaching profession, and respond positively to recommendations from the National Committee of Inquiry into the future of higher education.

The central economic objectives of my Government are high and stable levels of economic growth and employment, to be achieved by ensuring opportunity for all. The essential platform for achieving these objectives is economic stability.

To that end a Bill will be introduced to give the Bank of England operational responsibility for setting interest rates, in order to deliver price stability and support the Government's overall economic policy, within a framework of enhanced accountability. My Government will also ensure that public borrowing is controlled through tough fiscal rules and that the burden of public debt is kept at a stable and prudent level. They will aim to deliver high and sustainable levels of growth and employment by encouraging investment in industry, skills, infrastructure and new technologies; by reducing long-term unemployment, especially among young people; by promoting competition; and by helping to create successful and profitable business. These policies will enhance Britain's position as a leading industrial nation.

My Government have pledged to mount a fundamental attack upon youth and long-term unemployment and will take early steps to implement a welfare-to-

work programme to tackle unemployment, financed by a levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities which will be brought forward in an early Budget.

A new partnership with business will be at the heart of my Government's plans to build a modern and dynamic economy to improve the competitiveness of British industry. They will bring forward legislation to reform and strengthen competition law and introduce a statutory right to interest on late payment of debts. My Government is committed to fairness at work and will introduce a national minimum wage.

Legislation will be brought forward to amend criminal law and to combat crime, including reform of the youth justice system and measures against anti-social behaviour. A Bill will be introduced to prohibit the private possession of handguns.

My Government will improve the National Health Service, as a service providing care on the basis of need to the whole population. They will bring forward new arrangements for decentralisation and co-operation within the service and for ending the internal market. Legislation will be introduced to clarify the existing powers of NHS Trusts to enter into partnerships with the private sector. A White Paper will be published on measures to reduce tobacco consumption, including legislation to ban tobacco advertising.

My Government will contribute to the achievement of high standards of food safety and protection of public health throughout the food chain, will ensure openness and transparency of information to consumers, and will consult widely on recommendations for a Food Standards Agency.

A Bill will be introduced to ensure that as many people as possible have access to the benefits of the National Lottery including for health and education projects.

Measures will be introduced to enable capital receipts from the sale of council houses to be invested in housebuilding and renovation as part of my Government's determination to deal with homelessness and unemployment.

My Government is committed to open and transparent Government. They will introduce a Bill to strengthen data protection controls. They will enhance people's aspirations for better, more accessible and accountable public services, using Information Technology to the full. A White Paper will be published on proposals for a Freedom of Information Bill.

A Bill will be introduced to incorporate into United Kingdom law the main provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Decentralisation is essential to my Government's vision of a modern nation. Legislation will be introduced to allow the people of Scotland and Wales to vote

in referendums on my Government's proposals for a devolved Scottish Parliament and the establishment of a Welsh Assembly. If these proposals are approved in the referendums, my Government will bring forward legislation to implement them. Legislation will be introduced to provide for a referendum on a directly elected strategic authority and a directly elected mayor for London. A Bill will be brought forward to establish Regional Development Agencies in England outside London.

In Northern Ireland my Government will seek reconciliation and a political settlement which has broad support, working in co-operation with the Irish Government. They will work to build trust and confidence in Northern Ireland by bringing forward legislation to deal with terrorism and to reduce tension over parades, and other measures to protect human rights, combat discrimination in the workplace, increase confidence in policing and foster economic development.

Members of the House of Commons,

Estimates for the public service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the house of Commons,

In the European Union, my Government will take a leading role. They will seek to promote employment, improve competitiveness, complete the Single Market and opt into the Social Chapter. They will seek further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to secure lower food prices for consumers and save money, support the rural economy and enhance the environment. They will seek changes to the Common Fisheries Policy to conserve fish stocks in the long-term interest of the UK fishing industry. They will play a full part in the debate about Economic and Monetary Union.

My Government will work for the early and successful enlargement of the European Union. They will pursue an outcome to the Intergovernmental Conference and use their Presidency in the first half of 1998 to strengthen European co-operation while advancing the United Kingdom's interests and to make the Union more open, democratic and efficient. A Bill will be introduced to amend the European Communities Act if necessary.

My Government will ensure a strong defence based on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and promote international peace and security. They will play a major role in decisions to shape NATO's future, including enlargement, and to include Russia in a wider security framework. To ensure that the United Kingdom's defence capabilities are matched to the changing strategic setting, my Government will reassess our essential security interests and defence needs.

My Government will retain strong armed forces, including the nuclear deterrent. Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will be a priority.

My Government will work for reforms to make the United Nations more effective and for an early resolution of its funding crisis. My Government will continue to support peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They will work for a settlement in Cyprus. They will promote efforts for a durable peace in the Middle East.

My Government will work on behalf of Hong Kong's people to achieve a successful transition which preserves their way of life and promotes their continued stability and prosperity.

Preparations will continue for the G7 Summit to be held in Birmingham and the second Asia-Europe Meeting in London in 1998. My Government will host the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in October 1997 and seize the opportunity to increase co-operation between the United Kingdom and other members of the Commonwealth.

My Government have established a Department for International Development. They will publish a White Paper setting out how, through more coherent policies, they will tackle global poverty and promote sustainable development. They will rejoin the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

My Government will promote open markets around the world, while ensuring that the interests of developing countries and the global environment are fairly reflected.

The promotion of human rights worldwide will be a priority, as will the fight against terrorism, organised crime, money laundering and drug misuse and trafficking at home and abroad.

My Government will seek to restore confidence in the integrity of the nation's political system by upholding the highest standards of honesty and propriety in public life. They will consider how the funding of political parties should be regulated and reformed.

They will programme House of Commons business to ensure more effective scrutiny of Bills and better use of the time of Members of the House of Commons. During the course of the session, my Government will also publish in draft for public consultation a number of Bills, which it intends to introduce in subsequent sessions of this Parliament. They will propose the establishment of a new Select Committee of the House of Commons to look at ways of making Parliamentary procedure more effective and efficient.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons,

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Speech taken from website: <http://gos.sbc.edu/e/elizabethII.html>

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