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DRAFT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE

The House will recall that on 27 May we voted on the procedure motion on the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill. The first Vote was decided by the Speaker's casting vote and on the second the Government had a majority of one. It was subsequently alleged that the Government's majority had been achieved by questionable means, and since then there has been a sense of grievance, resulting in the breakdown of communications through the usual channels.

It is not in the interests of the House that matters should remain in this state. The business of the House is being disrupted and the Members themselves are being put to considerable inconvenience and even, in some cases, distress.

The right honourable Lady, the Leader of the Opposition, and I met informally last week to consider how best to deal with this. We recognised that there was a sense of grievance about the Vote on 27 May. We thought it right therefore to ask our Chief Whips privately to carry out together an informal enquiry on their own into what had happened, and to let us have a common report for our private consideration. This they have done, and the right honourable Lady and I have considered it together.

x | The Report makes clear that there was undoubtedly misunderstanding about the pairing and voting arrangements on 27 May, and that the normal courtesy of consultation about changes in pairing was not observed as it should have been.

In the light of this I do not believe that matters should be left as they are and I propose, after consultation with the Leader of the House and the Chief Whip, that it would be in the best interests of the House if the Government were to provide the opportunity for the issues on which the votes were taken on 27 May to be considered again and the matter put to the Vote in an appropriate way. The Leader of the Opposition, has already, with her colleagues, tabled a Motion to refer the Shipbuilding and Aircraft

/Industries Bill

Industries Bill to a Select Committee, and if the House were to debate that Motion this would provide the opportunity for the House to Vote again on the matter. Accordingly, the Leader of the House will be announcing in his Business statement on Thursday that a debate will be arranged on the right honourable Lady's Motion.

I hope that an arrangement of this kind will commend itself to the House and that the two Chief Whips will meet to discuss how to avoid a recurrence of the events of May 27, so that we can resume the orderly arrangements of our affairs through the usual channels.

22 June 1976