

PRIME MINISTER'S ENGAGEMENTS

Cabinet met this morning at 11 a.m. for 85 minutes with all present except:-

Lord Hailsham - Switzerland
Mr. Atkins - Tunisia
Mr. Prior - Corfu
Mr. Carlisle - Barbados
Mr. Walker - Corfu
Mr. St. John Stevas - New York
Mr. Jenkins - Scotland.

These members of the Cabinet were away on holiday or business and the Prime Minister had indicated that she did not expect them to attend if it was particularly difficult for them to get back to London.

Later this morning the Prime Minister also had a brief meeting with Sir Curtis Keeble, our ambassador in Moscow who happened to be in Britain at the moment - correspondents should not attach any particular significance to this meeting, which was a routine one.

CABINET MEETING ON RHODESIA

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary gave an oral report to their colleagues on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka. Obviously they discussed that part of the Communique dealing with Southern Africa and Ministers endorsed the statement on Rhodesia contained in the Communique.

Ministers decided to call a constitutional conference to which all the parties would be invited. Invitations would be sent out shortly and a further Government statement on Rhodesia could be expected in the course of next week.

[The above can obviously be used in an unrestricted way with correspondents. What follows was given to the Lobby on the usual un-attributable basis.]

INVITATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

These would go out next week to the parties directly concerned. The invitations would not restrict attendance in any way or seek to exclude individuals. We could not speculate about ~~the~~ possible absentees from the constitutional conference or comment on attendance by any particular individual (e.g. Ian Smith, about whom-predictably-we were asked).

Lord Carrington would chair the constitutional conference.

DATES FOR THE CONFERENCE

We confirmed that dates for the constitutional conference were discussed at Cabinet but could not give guidance on what they might be. Correspondents could assume that it would be held in London sometime next month but obviously the specific dates would have to be put to the parties first before being given to the press.

DEREK DAY'S ROLE

We understood he would be leaving for Salisbury tomorrow and has of course been travelling frequently between there and London. Asked whether Mr. Day would also seek to see Mr. Mugabe or Mr. Nkomo, we said that Mr. Day's role ^{was} ~~there~~ in Salisbury. If it was necessary for anyone to see Messrs Mugabe/Nkomo, then of course it would be considered.

COMMONWEALTH ROLE

We emphasised that it had been made clear in Lusaka that the invitations to the constitutional conference would be addressed to the parties directly concerned. It was accepted that the Commonwealth did not have a role at the constitutional conference.

IS THE BRITISH GOVT. OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE COURSE OF ACTION ON WHICH IT HAS EMBARKED?

The Prime Minister has made it clear that she is not starry-eyed and that she wished to proceed one step at a time in trying to find a solution to the Rhodesian problem. This feeling is shared by

her colleagues in Cabinet who are solidly behind her approach. One important step was made last week at Lusaka and the next step was to call a constitutional conference, a development which was endorsed by the Commonwealth. These were important developments ~~but~~ the Prime Minister and her Cabinet recognised that it was only the beginning.

We emphasised that we were not prepared to discuss what might or might not happen after the constitutional conference had taken place. This was a matter ~~to~~ of legitimate speculation for the press but ~~a~~ Government spokesmen could not be part of it. As had been made clear, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary were adopting a step by step approach.

HOW LONG WOULD THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE LAST?

We said that it was open-ended and that we could not say exactly how long it would last. The areas for discussion had been defined to a large extent already in that the Prime Minister had had ~~a~~ many bilateral meetings in Lusaka (11 to be exact), as had Lord Carrington both before and during the Lusaka meeting. Lord Harlech's and Mr. Luce's missions had also helped to define the area for discussion.

A brief outline of the main features of the ~~The~~ draft constitution would be prepared in Whitehall and circulated to the parties invited to the conference before it took place.

WOULD THERE BE ANY FURTHER CABINET MEETINGS BEFORE THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE ~~XXX~~ TOOK PLACE?

We saw no reason to hold another Cabinet Meeting to consider the draft constitution. As for further Ministerial meetings to consider the implications of the new constitution, these could be arranged should they be necessary. Nothing planned at present but we would not rule such ^a meeting out.

WILL IT BE A NEW CONSTITUTION OR AN AMENDED ONE?

We said that large tracks^c of the present constitution in Rhodesia would obviously remain as they followed well-worn paths of previous constitutions agreed in the Commonwealth whilst other aspects of the present ~~s~~ constitution would obviously have to be changed. Whether you called it a new or amended constitution was largely a matter of semantics.

WOULD THERE BE ANY RESTRICTIONS ON THE SIZE OF DELEGATIONS ATTENDING A COMMONWAALTH CONFERENCE?

We said that we had not examined this point in detail. Obviously it would be necessary from a purely logistical point of view to define the numbers that ~~would~~ ~~xxxxx~~ could be seated at the conference table at any one time but at the same time there would be no restriction on the size of each delegation present in London in the margins of the conference.

CVA