

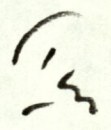
PPS  
(F) Foreign Affairs  
BBC Ext. S.

Prime Minister

BBC External Services - 3 hour debate on Tuesday 13 November

1. I have had a word with Michael Jopling about this debate this morning.
2. As you know, the Motion which stands on the Order Paper already, tabled by Julian Critchley and others, is to be tabled by the Opposition in identical terms.
3. That Motion reads:  
  
"That this House believes that there should be no cut in the spending of the External Services of the BBC."
4. Michael raised three points:
  - (a) Do you agree that our speakers should be Ian Gilmour and Peter Blaker (who replied to the Adjournment Debate on 2 November)?
  - (b) Do you agree that the Government should accept the Motion without amendment?
  - (c) Do you think that any revised Statement of Government policy should be made in advance of the debate on 13 November?
5. I think that our speakers should be Ian Gilmour and Peter Blaker, (it is most likely that Peter Shore will lead for the Opposition) and that we should accept the Motion without amendment.  
So far as advance notice is concerned, this was spelled out by Norman St John-Stevan during Business Questions yesterday and at the briefing attended by Angus yesterday afternoon. If you want to be asked a Question about this during your Questions on Tuesday, I am sure that we will be able to arrange this more successfully than we did on Thursday! On Tuesday, we have only one Tory Question in the first seven, but John Lee (Nelson & Colne) would be helpful if there has been no earlier supplementary on this subject.
6. I attach the text of the reply which we had prepared for Thursday.

9th November 1979

  
Ian Gow

cc MICHAEL JOPLING.

BBC EXTERNAL SERVICES

Line to take:

I have looked into this matter in some detail.

This year the provision for the BBC External Services is £40.3 m and next year it will be £45.2 m on the same price basis. That is an increase, in real terms, of £4.9 m or some 12%. Moreover, expenditure next year on capital projects, mainly the improvement of audibility, will be £7.1 m. That is four times this year's expenditure. The programme is due to continue at a similarly high level for some years.

These figures represent by an standards a high rate of growth. Although the revised provision is not as much as the BBC would like, the External Services are in fact receiving exceptionally favoured treatment in present circumstances.

The BBC have all along been reluctant to express any view on the priorities within the budget for the external services. But Ministers had a meeting on 7th November with the Acting Director General of the BBC to discuss whether a way could be found to maintain all the vernacular services within the increased provision. I am glad to say that it was agreed at that meeting to explore jointly ways of rephasing the Capital Expenditure Programme as a means of achieving the necessary savings. I hope that in this way it may prove possible to maintain all the vernacular services.

I do not think that I need to remind the House that I am strongly in favour of Britain's voice being heard, loud and clear, throughout the world - particularly since the fourth of May.