

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 1100 date: 17/12/79

PRIME MINISTER'S ENGAGEMENTS

(all times local - GMT bracketed)

- 0900: Record ABC TV interview with Barbara Walters (1400)
- 1000-1230: Talks at White House with President Carter (1500-1730)
- 1300: Lunch given by British Ambassador (1800)
- 1445-1545: Meet with Secretary of Defence, Harold Brown, and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff (1945-2045)
- 1600-1700: Meet members of Congress, Capitol Hill (2100-2200)
- 1715-1745: Call by Paul Volcker, Chairman of Federal Reserve Bank (2215-2245)
- 1745-1830: Press briefing (2245-2330)
- 1930-2300: Dinner at White House (0030-0400)

PRESS NOTICE

The Lord Plowden re-appointed to the Police Complaints Board as Chairman, Sir James Waddell and Sir George Ogden as Deputy Chairmen and Mrs Rosemary Wolff and Sir Frederick Hayday as members.

STATEMENTS

Airports Policy (followed by press conference)

PNQs

Mr David Myles to ask the Secretary of State for Trade if he will make a statement on the feared loss of the Banff registered fishing vessel "Ocean Monarch" in Shetland waters and the possible tragic loss of the seven men on board.

Mr Brynmor John to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest IRA outrages in Northern Ireland.

WRITTEN PQs OF INTEREST

No 230 Mr Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to change the sickness benefit scheme. (To be answered between 12 noon and 2.30 pm).

No 161 Mr James Wellbeloved (Bexley, Erith and Crayford): To ask the Prime Minister if she will refer to the Security Commission the evidence given by Mrs Khassoggi in respect of her relationship with a politician involved in defence matters.

LORD PRESIDENT

Lord Soames remains Lord President of the Council even though he is in Salisbury for the time being. Lord Hailsham will deputise for the Lord President at Privy Council Meetings.

AIRPORTS POLICY

We confirmed that this afternoon's statement would include something on a third London airport as well as ranging more widely to consider airports policy in general.

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DEINDEXATION

Against the background of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech at the weekend we pointed out that there were a number of items being considered by Ministers to bring about further savings in public expenditure. For example, Ministers might wish to consider widening differentials between those in and out of work - eg by raising tax thresholds (which would be expensive) or by deindexation of particular benefits. We could not steer correspondents in a particular direction at the moment but if as the Government had stated, it wished to reduce public expenditure further, then all possibilities had to be reviewed.

BRITISH LEYLAND

We were not aware that any statement was to be made this week on future Government financial support for British Leyland.

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LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 4.00

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PRIME MINISTER'S ENGAGEMENTS

The morning Lobby was repeated.

STATEMENTS

We told the Lobby operationally that the statement on nuclear power would probably be tomorrow; the one on Bingham some time this week; and, subject to what happened at Lancaster House, there may be a need for a statement on Rhodesia, which also would be some time this week.

KHASHOGGI AFFAIR

We said that we could not take the Prime Minister's Written Answer any further. The Lobby must assume that the Prime Minister had been given the relevant background information on which to make the judgment that there had been no breach of security. We were not aware if the Prime Minister had spoken to Mr Churchill or if he had written to her. A further Priority PQ on this from Mr Denis Canavan would be answered tomorrow.

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH TO THE FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

We said we would make copies of the speech available to the Lobby as soon as possible tomorrow. We expected the speech to cover the problems of domestic economies in the Western Alliance; the management of the world economy; the modernisation of our defences; seeking agreement with the East; the reduction of energy consumption ^{in general,} and of fossil fuel in particular; mutually advantageous relations with the oil producers; and help to developing countries.

ADDITIONS TO THE WHITE PAPER LIST

We told the Lobby that the 29th Legal Aid Annual Report for 1978/79 would be published on 20 December at 2.30 pm, CFRs 10.30 am the same day.

DHSS - WRITTEN PQ ON SICKNESS BENEFITS

We advised the Lobby to speak to DHSS on the implications behind the Answer.

JL