

PRIME MINISTER

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Rhodesia

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STATEMENTS IN THE HOUSE

There have been four Statements in the last three days - on the Third London Airport, Nuclear Power, Rhodesia and Bingham. The first three went exceptionally well, and gave the Government an air of enhanced authority and confidence. Today's Statement by the Attorney General did not go nearly as well.

Third London Airport

The Statement is at Flag A. Mr. Nott spent the best part of an hour dealing with supplementaries, most of which had a constituency flavour. He was warmly supported from most sides of the House, but ran into the expected sharp criticisms from Alan Haselhurst and Eldon Griffiths. Alan Haselhurst said that many people would regard the package he had announced as having expediency written all over it, and that it would cost £1 billion. Eldon Griffiths said that Mr. Nott should not assume too lightly that the Government would necessarily get their way.

Mr. Nott said that he understood that some people would be disappointed with the choice of Stansted for development, but that the total cost could be met out of the self-financing revenue of the BAA. He reminded Mr. Griffiths that when he was the Minister responsible, the Government went for Maplin.

Mr. Nott emphasised repeatedly that he was not proposing a wholly new third airport for London, but only the development of Stansted to meet the demand, together with the fourth terminal at Heathrow and the possible second terminal at Gatwick.

Nuclear Power

A copy of the Statement is at Flag B. Mr. Howell emphasised in dealing with supplementaries that safety would be the paramount consideration in reaching decisions, and that there would be a wide-ranging inquiry before any PWR was begun. He refused to give

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any indication of where future nuclear power stations would be built, and ran into a little trouble as a result.

Mr. Benn said that the programme now proposed would involve public expenditure of £10-20 billion. He called it a "crash programme, with American reactors not tried in this country and now suspect abroad". Mr. Howell said that the programme he had announced would result in 22 gigawatts at the end of 10 years, far short of the level outlined in Mr. Benn's own Green Paper of 40 gigawatts by the turn of the century.

Mr. Howell published yesterday the evaluations of the Kemeny report prepared by the NNC, CEGB and UKAEA. He said that he proposed to make public further documents to help to meet the queries and worries of Members and the public. He said that although a lot of research was going on, he could not see a very substantial contribution from wind, tide or wave power in the near future.

Overall, it seemed to me to be Mr. Howell's most confident and polished - and successful - performance in the House so far.

Rhodesia

The Lord Privy Seal made a brief Statement about the successful conclusion of the talks. He was congratulated without qualification from all sides of the House. This included such unlikely bed-fellows as Julian Amery - who said that he hoped events would prove that he had been wrong and that the Lord Privy Seal had been right throughout - Andrew Faulds, Don Concannon, Robert Hughes and Joan Lestor. There were some probing questions about South African troops, but they were avoided in a generally warm atmosphere.

Bingham

A copy of the Attorney's Statement is at Flag C. The Attorney General had a difficult afternoon today. I am afraid that he left the House with the impression that the main reason

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for not proceeding against the oil companies was that the case was too complicated; and that the Government had been out-witted, perhaps willingly, by being flooded with paper by the companies. David Steel said that the Attorney seemed to think that "justice and truth are commodities we can no longer afford" and described his Statement as not good enough. Robert Maxwell-Hyslop, one of the very few to speak from the Government side, asked whether the Attorney was not introducing the novel legal principle that retirement conveyed immunity from prosecution. The Attorney said that Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop was being too light-hearted and this brought loud cries from the Opposition benches. Dr. Jeremy Bray said that one of the Civil Servants he had named in the House before had taken a lucrative job with a consulting firm after the Head of the Civil Service had refused him permission to work for the oil companies themselves.

Robert Hughes said that the principle seemed to be that under British law the bigger the crime the better the chance of getting off. He called the Attorney's Statement a shameful end to a shabby episode and said that it brought into question your statements about economic boycotts on Iran. Mr. Dobson said that the decision was a disgrace not only to our system of Government and our judicial system but also for the Attorney General. Mr. Cryer said that there seemed to be one law for ordinary folk and another for people in high places, especially if well connected by marriage or relationships so as to get away with it. Mr. Rooker said that there had been no investigation of Castrol although it was mentioned in the preface to Bingham. Mr. Whitehead said that anyone seemed to be all right if he could produce 20,000 files and occupy a jury for a year. Peter Shore said that neither the House nor the country could accept the Attorney's Statement as a fitting end to this disgraceful affair.

In response to all of this, the Attorney repeated time after time that he could accept no slur on the integrity of the DPP and that the decision had been the Director's and was therefore remote from Government. He also repeated many times that the DPP had to take a view about the likelihood of a successful prosecution and in doing so had to take into account

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the possibility there might be one or two documents favourable to the defence which would be missed unless the investigators went through everything.

As an instance of the difficulty, he said that it might be necessary to get hold of freight tickets for individual wagon shipments of oil into Rhodesia and to call as witnesses the railwaymen themselves. The Opposition regarded these assertions as more than somewhat far fetched.

There are two outstanding questions which you may get tomorrow: whether there will be a further Parliamentary inquiry, and whether the Government will now publish the names left out of the original public version of Bingham because there was a risk of criminal prosecution. We will give you a line on both of these tomorrow.

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19 December 1979