

IAN (AND POSSIBLY)

(F)

TUESDAY

Th. low

Prime Minister.

FRANKS

Apr 27.
1

(Falkland Islands)

The most/only damaging matter of substance in the Franks Report is the failure of Lord C. to act on Ridley's conclusion that we had to sell the idea of leaseback to both the Islanders and the House of Commons. If we didn't sell this idea we had no strategy to avoid the real possibility of an Argentine invasion of the Islands. And we didn't do anything militarily to deter or prevent such an invasion, i.e. we didn't create a Fortress Falklands. (Leon Brittain's argument over a possible air/sea link charge to the contingency fund shows how unaware of the seriousness of the real problem were the Cabinet colleagues.

So why did Lord C. leave us with no strategy? The allegation is being made that he couldn't really sell the only viable solution, leaseback, to his colleagues, including the P.M. We may have to deal with this argument. Otherwise the P.M. will be seen to have accepted the likely development of an invasion without having a strategy for deterring it.

I suggest we can only escape criticism by blaming the Labour Party. Their performance in the Ridley Statement is culpable. The Guardian Leader says most of it. It is the Labour Party, and particularly members of its 1977 Defence Committee who, by their silence, put the safety of the Islands in great jeopardy! They ensured that, in the crucial discussion on Ridley in the Commons, he who spoke for them didn't know, and those who knew chose, disgracefully, not to speak. Party was put before country. Healey now regrets this, but is that good enough?

Given a dishonest Labour Party, and some well-intentioned but misguided Conservatives, Lord C. was right to play for time. The only viable solution was not saleable with a dishonest Labour Party rejecting in Opposition what it would have proposed in Government.

A Fortress Task Force would have to have been sent when it became clear that invasion was in the offing. Under normal circumstances that would have been after the start of action by Argentina such as closure of Air Services etc. To have sent the force too early would be to have created Fortress Falklands while a negotiated solution was still possible.

It is possible that some of this may be useful not for the P.M. but for one of our other speakers as the debate proceeds!

David