

PRIME MINISTER

Last summer Mr. David Steel wrote to you to suggest that it would be helpful if you could arrange for him a classified defence briefing similar to the one which Mr. Callaghan arranged for the Opposition in 1976.

You wrote to him saying that you thought that this was a good idea, and that you hoped to be able to find a suitable date for the briefing in the autumn. You also told him that you were writing to Michael Foot inviting him to attend the briefing.

You duly wrote to Mr. Foot on 19 July, 1981. We have since reminded his office at regular intervals that he owed you a reply. But he has had a succession of internal party difficulties over the invitation! He has now at last sent you an answer in which he declines the offer of a briefing (attached).

The question now is whether we go ahead with the briefing only for the Liberals. This seems to me to be hardly worth doing. It would also raise the question of SDP attendance (which was hardly an issue at the time Mr. Steel approached you). Mr. Steel incidentally has not been in touch with us at all to enquire about the delay in arranging the briefing.

If you are inclined to share my view that we should drop the idea of the briefing, would you first like to have a word about it with the Home Secretary and Chief Whip when you see them on Monday morning?

22 January, 1982.

Spoke today to the Home Secretary who demands that the SDP should be invited. She agrees in principle but being junior ministers we have to be careful of the same briefing might lead to awkwardness.

I told her I suppose to Sir T. Callaghan some time ago that I would suggest a briefing to Mr. Foot, but he had not taken up the idea.

Handwritten notes:
Having - fixed it -
we need to check.
? Labour's defence spokesman?
Some of our own
? junior ministers would probably like to attend
not
T.M.J.

T.M.J. 29.1.82.