

# LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 4 pm

date: 13/2/85

We repeated the morning Lobby.

## PONTINGRAMA

We said that we understood the form for Monday's debate was presently being discussed. We agreed that Mr Heseltine was a likely speaker, but we knew of no intention for the Prime Minister to speak. We did not know whether Mr Stanley would be winding up.

We did not know at what time the Prime Minister would be replying to Mr Kinnock's second letter, or to the letters received from Messrs Steel and Owen. As far as the Steel letter was concerned, the answers would be no, no and no again, while the other two would have to involve a degree of re-education. The PM's words in her letters reflect her concern and her intention to obtain a withdrawal, but she was quite relaxed about her own position. We thought it a pity that the authors of the recent spate of letters had not done their homework and gone back to letters sent to them last year which answered many of the points they were now making anew. We were not aware of any sanctions that could be applied against the Opposition, we would just keep battering away. Nor were we aware of any suggestion to discontinue co-operation through the usual channels.

Asked about the timetable of events at the time of the decision to prosecute Ponting, we drew on the PM's letter of 8 October 1984 to Mr Kinnock. We stressed that neither Mr Heseltine nor the Prime Minister knew of any amnesty suggestion being made to Ponting, and noted that only the Attorney General could have made such an offer and that he had denied any such suggestion was made. We also noted that in the course of the trial both the MOD Police and the MOD's Director of Establishments had denied that such an offer was made. We said that the Prime Minister had been informed of the decision to prosecute by her Private office, while on holiday in Austria.

We repeatedly stressed that Ministers had not been involved in the decision to prosecute, and we noted that the Civil Service hated leakers too, which was why there was so much anger around - it was after all a question of the integrity of the Civil Service too. Ponting had other courses open to him rather than leaking, within the MOD and up to either the Secretary of State or the Head of the Civil Service, or even resignation.

We said that it was a perfectly normal practice to write different drafts/briefs based on different sets of assumptions about the confidentiality of source documents.

IRM