

Prime Minutes 2



Ref. A085/3271

MR WICKS

CF
Fed Cabinet Bail Up
folders
NLW

Westlands

I undertook to investigate the "ring round" for a possible further meeting of E(A) on Friday 13 December, to which the Secretary of State for Defence referred in Cabinet on Thursday 12 December.

2. The sequence of events seems to have been as follows:

1. E(A) at its meeting on 9 December took the decision recorded in the minutes.

2. Shortly before the end of the meeting the Prime Minister said (according to my notes) that we might need to review the position on Friday, before the expiry of the 4.00 pm deadline.

- We then agreed the wording etc which put the decision as in the final minute

3. This was taken as an indication that it might prove to be necessary for E(A) to meet again on Friday 13 December. Accordingly a member of the Secretariat asked the Committee Section to ring round the Private Office of members of E(A) to see whether they would be available for a meeting on Friday 13 December, if it proved necessary to summon such a meeting.

LB
communicated
to
Sir John
MT

4. About an hour after the end of the meeting you spoke to my Private Secretary to say that no arrangements whatever should be made for a further meeting of E(A) on this subject.

5. On the morning of Tuesday 10 December this instruction was repeated by Mr Powell to Mr Wiggins.

EDITOR'S TRANSCRIPT [13 DEC 2014]
- We then agreed the wording etc which put the decision as in the final minute which
LB [Leon Brittan] communicated to Sir John MT

6. The Committee Section were accordingly instructed to ring round again to make it clear that they were not seeking to fix a meeting and that Ministers were not required to cancel or refuse other engagements. This ring round was not completed until the morning of Wednesday 11 December.

3. As the Lord President said, it is normal for the Cabinet Office to ring round Private Offices, if it is thought that a meeting may be going to be required, particularly on a Friday (when a number of Ministers can be expected to be out of town), to find out who will be available and when, and such a ring round does not imply a definite decision to call the meeting. To that extent what was done was a normal and appropriate precaution, in case a meeting might be needed. It was not a summons to attend a meeting, but I am afraid that the Secretary of State for Defence gave Cabinet on Thursday 12 December the impression that it was, and I am very sorry that the Prime Minister was embarrassed by it.

RIA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

16 December 1985