

Prime Minutes

See my marginal comments. Agree?

(Charles, Tom and I spent over an hour tonight with RTA rehearsing Qs and A. The Chief Whip spent 1/2 an hour with him

Ref. A086/374

MR WICKS

Westland: Defence Select Committee

this morning doing the same.)

We discussed this morning the questions which Mr Brittan declined to answer before the Defence Select Committee on 30 January. N.L.W. 4.2

2. I enclose a draft of the line which Sir Robert Armstrong might take if asked similar questions on 5 February.

3. I am copying this minute to Mr MacLean.

MS

Accepted - see statement
not agreed

M C STARK

4 February 1986

Accepted

not agreed

Q. Who decided the Solicitor General's letter accusing Michael Heseltine of inaccuracies should be leaked selectively and not in full?

A. It was the view of the DTI that the fact that the letter had been sent and the opinion expressed in it needed to be got into the public domain urgently. Mr Brittan agreed that this should be done, and done in specific terms. What was released was what the DTI thought was necessary to meet the requirement approved by the Secretary of State. The method of release was proposed by the DTI and ^{accepted} agreed by No 10.

Q. What discussions were there with No 10 about the selective nature of the leak?

A. The method of disclosure was discussed between the DTI and No 10. No 10 ^{accepted?} agreed with the DTI proposal that, given the need for speed, the Chief Press Officer at the DTI should make the disclosure by means of a telephone communication to the Press Association.

Best to use exact words of your 23 Jan statement - see over page.

Q. When did Mr Brittan know a leak inquiry was being set up?

A. 3 He would have learned of the Prime Minister's decision soon after I myself did, on 13 January. He would have known during the previous week that a proposal to institute an inquiry was under active consideration.

RTA should refer to answer these 2 questions.

Q. Did he know it was being set up before it was publicly announced?

A. 4 Only on 13 January (one day before the announcement in the House); the Prime Minister's decision was not communicated to anyone until then.

He cannot be expected to know what Mr Brittan

knows and did not know. ✓ mb

My office were accordingly approached. They did not seek my agreement: they considered—and they were right—that I should agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that the fact that the then Defence Secretary's letter of 3 January was thought by the Solicitor-General to contain material inaccuracies which needed to be corrected should become public knowledge as soon as possible, and before Sir John Cuckney's press conference. It was accepted that the Department of Trade and Industry should disclose that fact and that, in view of the urgency of the matter, the disclosure should be made by means of a telephone communication to the Press Association. [Interruption.] Had I been consulted, I should have said that a different way must be found of making the relevant facts known.

Q. Did Mr Brittan have no conversations with the Prime Minister - as Mrs Thatcher told the House on Monday - about the fact that he himself had authorised a leak?

5
A. ~~I know of no such conversations.~~ [The Prime Minister has said that there were none.]

Better answer is by an explicit quote of what you said.

Q. Was Mr Brittan interviewed during the leak inquiry by Sir Robert Armstrong?

A. No. [My inquiry was limited to the role of officials.] But the Prime Minister discussed the findings of the inquiry with him on 22 January, and I was present.

Q. Did he discuss with his staff the likely course of the leak inquiry?

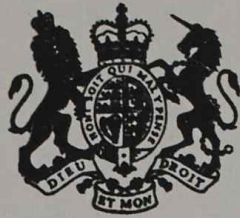
A. I know of no such conversations, but it is a matter for Mr Brittan to answer. My inquiry was concerned only with the disclosure itself, and not with people's reactions after the event.

Q. Why was the Solicitor General not told that his letter was being leaked?

A. The discussions which led to the decision to choose this particular means of disclosure are now well documented. The Prime Minister has said that she deeply regrets that the disclosure was made without reference to the Solicitor General.

See marginal comment on previous page. RTA should not answer.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

MR STARK
CABINET OFFICE

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 4 February about the answers to the questions which Mr. Brittan declined to answer before the Defence Select Committee on 30 January.

The Prime Minister has commented as follows on your suggested answers:

Answer 1 "Agreed" in the last line of his answer should read "accepted". This is an important change, for all the reasons that Sir Robert will recall in the drafting of the Prime Minister's statement on 23 January.

Answer 2 The exact words used in colum 450 (the third full paragraph) of Hansard 23 January should be used instead of those suggested in your draft. (You will note that again "agreed" should be "accepted".)

Answers 3,
4,
7 The Prime Minister believes that Sir Robert should refuse to answer these questions. He cannot be expected to speak on what Mr. Brittan knew and did not know.

Answer 5 This answer should use the exact words that the Prime Minister used herself in the House. (Col 657
p 275)

N.L. WICKS
5 January 1986

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