

MASTER CC SUBJECT



File

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

THE REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE ON WESTLAND

The Prime Minister had a short discussion this morning with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip about the Government's response to the Select Committee's Report.

It was agreed that three questions for Written Answer should be tabled tomorrow to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Attorney General for answer on Thursday which could, if necessary be used as pegs for statements on the Select Committee's Report. It was suggested that the Question might be in the form:

"To ask the Prime Minister/Secretary of State for Defence/Attorney General if they have yet received a copy of the Report of the Select Committee on Defence on Westland."

If it was decided not to use the pegs, the question could be answered with a simple "Yes".

Ministers thought it inevitable that the Prime Minister would be asked about the Westland Report at Oral Questions. Indeed, it would be worth ensuring that she received an early Oral Question on this subject so that she would have a good opportunity to give a reply, in the form she chose, which effectively blocked further hostile questioning. Her Oral Answers could make clear that the Government would reply to the Select Committee's Report in the normal way but she wanted to take this early opportunity to reaffirm her fullest confidence in any officials criticised in the Report and to rule out disciplinary action. She would consider, in the light of the oral exchanges, whether a further Written Answer would be necessary. In any event, a Written Answer would not be given until after 3.30 pm. On the text attached to your minute ref. A086/2142 to the Attorney General, the Prime Minister thought that it was much too long. The draft should be short and to the point, dignified and brief.

The Prime Minister did not believe that it was appropriate for her to answer on behalf of the Attorney General for his conduct in his capacity as a Law Officer. He should reply himself directly through an arranged Parliamentary Question, though she would be grateful to see the draft of the text he

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proposed to use. It would be important for the Attorney General to avoid saying anything in his Answer which would prompt the Select Committee to summon him as a witness. You kindly undertook to speak to the Attorney General's office about this.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Mr Morris (Lord Privy Seal's office) and Mr Maclean (Chief Whip's office).

*Tfu*

*Mr.* N.L. WICKS

22 July 1986