

Mr. Chase

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MR ONSLOW'S VISIT

1. Ambassador Batalha told me last night that he had consulted the Secretary-General about my proposal to invite one or two Brazilian friends with responsibilities in the field of defence (such as General Werner and Admiral Aratanha) to meet the Minister of State at the informal dinner which I proposed to give at the Residence on Monday 9 August. As he suspected, Baena Soares was not at all keen on this idea. He feared that news of such contacts would inevitably leak to the press and that the wrong construction would be put on them. Nevertheless, Batalha pointed out, I was entitled to invite whoever I wished to the Embassy. I said I would take the Secretary-General's views into account, though I did not subscribe to his fears. I gave no undertaking of any kind, nor did Ambassador Batalha seem to expect me to do so.
2. I asked Batalha whether he had any further thoughts on our suggestion that Mr Onslow should meet the press at the airport before his departure from Brasilia. He said he thought this a very good idea. Although Baena Soares was worried about this too, he personally was confident that Mr Onslow would be able to handle the press in a low key and without any unpleasant repercussions. He remarked that when it came to blurring things out to the press, nobody was better at doing that than President Figueiredo himself, as witness his off-the-cuff remarks in the streets of Ottawa on the previous day, in the course of which he had revealed more about Brazil's position in relation to Argentina in the Falklands than the Foreign Minister had done during the whole conflict!
3. I then said that I hoped that the Secretary-General had overcome whatever reservations he might previously have had about attending the lunch I was proposing to give for the Minister of State on Tuesday 10 August. Batalha said that Baena Soares would certainly come to the lunch, though he did not seem to relish the idea. He was well known for his dislike of official lunches in the middle of the day, partly because his working day was so long and a break of an hour or so at home was very precious to him. Batalha went on to say (as he has explained to me on former occasions) that far too much responsibility was concentrated in the hands of the Secretary-General, who refused to delegate anything. Whereas in the FCO we had a bevy of Under-Secretaries who could take responsibility for their respective sectors, in the Itamaraty everything had to be referred either to the Minister or to the Secretary-General, frequently to both. This resulted in an immense strain on both men and a great deal of frustration among their departmental heads. He personally felt that the Itamaraty machine was

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20 years out of date and needed to be geared up to meet the modern pace of life.

4. Pursuing my point, I then asked if Baena Soares had doubts about the timing of Mr Onslow's visit. Batalha confirmed that he had: he considered that it was really too early and that the risks of it being misunderstood (presumably by the Argentines) outweighed any possible advantages. I disputed this with some force. If Brazil was really interested in securing a reconciliation of the two combatant nations and re-introducing conditions of peace and tranquillity in the South Atlantic, would it not be an excellent opportunity for them to speak their minds to a responsible British Minister and try to bring their influence to bear on the British side, as they were presumably doing on the Argentine side already? Surely even the Argentines could not object to such a visit, since they themselves professed keenness to return to negotiations with the British? In diplomacy, as in other fields, it was a case of nothing ventured, nothing won. Batalha did not dispute my point, but repeated that Baena Soares was overworked and inundated with all manner of problems. He implied that the visits in the previous week of the Foreign Ministers of Chile and Italy would also be imposing an unwelcome extra burden: and he concluded by saying that Baena was usually against everything anyway.

Comment

5. Although Baena Soares' rather grudging attitude to Mr Onslow's visit is not exactly encouraging, I do not think that it need worry us too much. As Batalha indicated, I think it owes more to Baena's obviously excessive workload than to any personal antipathy to the British Government. I have always found Baena personally very friendly and easy to talk to, though even more cautious than most of his subordinates in showing more than a minimum of the Brazilian hand in any negotiation. I do not think that Mr Onslow will find him attractive, any more than Lord Carrington (and still less the Prime Minister) found Dr Guerreiro attractive. But he is businesslike: and his immediate collaborators, such as Ambassador Ricupero (whose knowledge of the Latin American scene is encyclopedic) will give a very good account of themselves, if allowed to do so. I think that if Mr Onslow concentrates on a sober analysis of the problems confronting both Britain and Brazil in the various areas covered by the agenda, the talks will go well. As to the meeting with the Foreign Minister, since it appears to be Dr Guerreiro himself who decided in the light of our representations and evidently against his Secretary-General's advice to slot Mr Onslow's visit into the vacant space left by the Dutch Prime Minister, we can assume that he will give the Minister of State a fair hearing, though on past form he will occupy quite a bit of the time with an inaudible and inconclusive monologue about Brazil's particular concerns.

6. As to the vexed question of the dinner on Monday night, I shall make overtures to General Werner and Admiral Aratanha and one or two others. Being well disciplined officers, they will very probably consult the Itamaraty and may be advised to steer clear of entanglement with the Minister of State. But I think it is worth trying anyway.



23 July 1982

G W Harding

cc: Mr Fearn, SAmD ✓
HMCG, Rio de Janeiro