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*DKI - 15 Feb.  
Chernobyl renew file  
please*

BRIGADIER BUDD

c: Mr Addison ✓

CHERNOBYL PQ

You sought my views on the proposed Written Answer.

I think the great deficiency with the Answer as at present drafted is that:

1. it tells us nothing about our performance as a nation in handling Chernobyl;
2. it exposes us to the charge that we have done nothing 'until Chernobyl jogged us' about gearing up to meet any accident in nuclear France across the Channel;
3. suggests that we did not have nationwide coverage of monitoring and so raises the scare question as to whether similar restrictions applied to lamb in certain areas should have been applied more widely, or to other foodstuffs; in other words if there was no nationwide coverage earlier this year, how do we know everybody is OK?

*and it suggests that we have done precisely what we should do*

One addition and one amendment would help:

- add at the end of the second sentence in paragraph 2:  
....in the UK "and worked well in coping with the consequences in the UK of the Chernobyl accident"
- amend second sentence, paragraph 3:  
"Among other things, the objective will be to ensure nationwide....."

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We need a clearer indication of the timescale. "Maximum possible speed" is too vague. Alternatively, we need to give greater assurance that existing plans worked well in handling an external incident in the shape of Chernobyl; otherwise the scaremongers will have an opportunity to go to work.

BERNARD INGHAM

15 December 1986

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*cc/BG*

Y202



*NFA*  
*To be*

c Mr Unwin (without attachment)  
Mr Norgrove ✓

Mr Ingham

*pls*  
*15/12 at 11:45*

The Lessons of Chernobyl

1. You saw a copy of Mr Unwin's minute of 2 December, to Mr Norgrove, to which were attached details of a proposed PQ and the written answer which the Prime Minister was to be invited to give plus some supplementary notes for use in reply to questions.
2. Since then both the proposed written answer and supplementary notes have been revised. Final clearance is now awaited only from the Attorney General and all being well it is hoped that the question will be asked and the answer given before the Christmas recess - possibly on Thursday 18 December. A copy of the revised material is attached - but obviously not for use until the clearance mentioned above is obtained.
3. You may wish to take advantage of your weekly meeting with Information Officers later today to prepare the ground for any co-ordination of the public information line that may be needed once the question has been answered.

BRIGADIER J A J BUDD

15 December 1986

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Question Will the Prime Minister make a statement on the review of contingency plans following the Chernobyl accident.

Answer The first stage of a thorough review of existing emergency plans and procedures in the light of our experience of the Chernobyl accident has now been completed by the Cabinet Office in consultation with the appropriate Government Departments and agencies concerned.

2. The existing plans are addressed specifically to an accident occurring within the UK and cover both the emergency procedures at the site and offsite arrangements to protect the public. They continue to provide a valid basis for the response to any nuclear accident in the UK. However the Government have decided that planning needs to provide more specifically for the response to a nuclear accident outside the UK.

3. Detailed planning is now in hand. *for what?* Among other things this will need to ensure nationwide monitoring coverage and, in the light of expert assessment of the results of monitoring, for the dissemination of appropriate advice and information to the general public. In the event of any future nuclear accident overseas affecting the United Kingdom the Secretary of State for the Environment will take the lead in co-ordinating Government action. *what*

4. At the same time the Government will continue to work with our international partners both in the International Atomic Energy Agency and elsewhere to improve the arrangements for coordinated international action. *Chernobyl accident is in UK?* In the meantime, the two recently signed International Atomic Energy Agency sponsored conventions should ensure earlier and more effective notification and dissemination of information than occurred in the case of the Chernobyl accident.

5. I shall make a further statement when the detailed planning now in hand has been completed and appropriate steps will be taken to make the new arrangements known to the public and to all the authorities concerned.

CHERNOBYL - Supplementary Notes for use in reply to questions

1. Lead Department

- (i) As already explained for any future accident overseas the Secretary of State for the Environment will take the lead;
- (ii) For any accident within the UK the Secretary of State for Energy, Defence, Scotland or Transport will take lead responsibility in accordance with existing plans.

2. Publication of the Interim Report?

No (not the practice to publish internal Cabinet Committee working documents of this kind). But, as in the past, the outcome of the review will in due course be publicised in contingency plans which will be made available in the usual way (in public libraries, through local liaison committees etc) as soon as practicable.

3. Why is the planning taking a long time?

- (i) a great deal of complex and detailed planning, particularly at local level, still has to be done;

- (ii) but the first stage of the review has mapped this out and the follow-up work is already under way.

4. What consultation with Local Authorities?

Will be undertaken as appropriate during the further planning. Aware of views expressed by Association of County Councils on 23 September - many of which coincide with priorities already identified ie. need for a nationwide monitoring coverage, expert assessment of the results, dissemination of appropriate advice and information to the General Public.

5. Are changes contemplated for present plans?

Present plans continue to provide a valid basis for responding to any nuclear accident in the UK. But consideration of certain detailed aspects is continuing and any changes that would serve to make the plans more effective will be made.

6. Area from which evacuation might be required?

[The Russians evacuated an area of some 35 Km around the Chernobyl reactor]. Current UK plans incorporate evacuation up to a distance of 2-3 Km in the circumstances of what is known as a 'reference accident' (ie. the accident defined in present plans as causing the largest off-site release of radioactivity), with other public protection measures (eg. monitoring, control of contaminated food and water supplies etc) up to some 40 Km from the site. But they provide the basis for evacuation on a larger scale, if it should prove necessary.



7. EC cooperation?

Work is continuing within the EC to set up, in the light of the Chernobyl experience, arrangements for coping more effectively with any future radiation hazards. The UK is playing a full part in that work.

8. How long will additional work take?

It will proceed with the maximum speed possible.

9. How often are plans reviewed?

A continuous process in the light of developing technology and techniques. Plans for responding to an accident at one of our nuclear installations were reviewed after the accident at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979. A number of changes were made then and details of the revised plans were set out in 1982 in the booklet published by the Health and Safety Executive entitled "Emergency Plans for Civil Nuclear Installations. In addition regular exercises are held which frequently produce lessons which lead to the review and improvement of plans.



DISASTERS: Soviet Nuclear Accident April 26



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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

12 December 1986

Dear Robin,

NBP

### THE LESSONS OF CHERNOBYL

The Lord President held a meeting on 10 December in the Large Ministerial Conference Room in the House of Commons. Besides your Secretary of State, the Secretary of State for Energy, the Paymaster General, Ministers of State for the Armed Forces, Transport and the Home Office, the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State for Scotland, and Health and Social Security, Mr Unwin and Brigadier Budd of the Cabinet Office were present.

The Lord President stated that the purpose of the meeting was to resolve the difficult issue of lead department responsibility in the event of a nuclear accident overseas affecting the United Kingdom, it having proved impossible to obtain agreement on this matter in the Lessons of Chernobyl Working Group.

Your Secretary of State said that he thought it important to have a designated lead Minister to co-ordinate the Government's response in the event of such an accident and to act as the main spokesman in Parliament. He believed that the lead Minister should also be closely involved in supervisory contingency planning and questioned whether it was really necessary to distinguish between nuclear accidents at home or overseas so far as the appointment of a lead Minister was concerned.

During discussion, there was general agreement on the importance of the role to be played by a lead Minister and his department, with appropriate support from the Cabinet Office and other relevant Departments and agencies, in the event of a nuclear accident; that differences between the kinds of accidents that could occur made it acceptable to have different lead Ministers in respect of domestic nuclear accidents; that the well practised current contingency plans for UK accidents stood a good chance of working effectively, although some revisions would be appropriate in the light of Chernobyl; that public perception of the likely credibility of a lead Minister would need to be taken into account in deciding the allocation of this responsibility and that a Cabinet Committee would not be the best way of discharging lead Minister responsibilities.

Robin Young Esq

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