

PRIME MINISTER

FALKLANDS ISSUES IN PARLIAMENT, 10 JUNE

At Prime Minister's Question Time, Mr. Foot concentrated - as expected - on the content of his letter to you. The Home Secretary replied on the basis of the mini-statement which you had approved in Bonn overnight, and did not allow himself to be pressed further. Most other Questions were on the Falklands, but the Home Secretary simply referred back to statements and Answers which you have previously given. He did tell the House that you hoped to be in contact with Party Leaders shortly about the review of the work of Government Departments prior to the invasion. He confirmed that the Government would seriously consider representations made about repatriation of bodies.

The final Question came from Leo Abse asking, in over-emotional fashion, how many more men had to die before you would give up this escapade. The Home Secretary spoke, in a moving and effective way, of the special concern felt by those who had fought for their country in earlier times about the fate of those who are asked to fight now. The result was that he was cheered from the House at the end of Question Time.

You saw the Defence Secretary's statement in Bonn. For the Opposition, Mr. Silkin did not press very hard; he simply restated the Opposition's views on the need for action in the Security Council. But he pressed one concern: that MOD had told people not to ring the special telephone numbers in the last 36 hours at a time when many families simply needed a sympathetic voice to talk to, even if that voice could only say that there was no information yet. Mr. Nott stressed that the position of next of kin was an overriding concern for MOD, but that there was a national requirement to counter exaggerated Argentine propaganda, which meant that some comments about action often have to be made earlier than he might wish. MOD had also to consider the operational value to an enemy of making detailed announcements.

/Edward Du Cann

Edward Du Cann wanted an assurance that our fleet was receiving all possible protection from early warning radar and Mr. Nott conceded that we lack an airborne early warning system. Dick Crawshaw, expressing sympathy for relatives of casualties, stressed that we must steel ourselves to go through with the necessary action, in the knowledge that failure to do so would cost more. Charles Morrison started an exchange about news availability and Mr. Nott spoke of criticism both for providing too much and for providing too little. He praised very highly the work of task force correspondents.

Reg Freeson suggested a contradiction between statements that Tuesday's losses would not affect our capacity on the Falklands and our refusal to provide casualty information. Further comments raised no new angles, and Mr. Nott on the whole achieved understanding for his inability to give even orders of magnitude on casualties at this stage.

MA

10 June 1982