

EASTER RECESSLORD PRESIDENT'S LOBBY

The Lord President said that Easter recess was of usual length and he had not known longer recesses in recent years. In the face of some consternation from the Lobby the Lord President agreed to bear in mind the need for longer hols in future years.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Lord President indicated that lengthy discussions were continuing on the Northern Ireland initiative. A statement would not necessarily be made before the Easter recess but could not be excluded. The Lord President said the nature of final Cabinet decision would determine whether legislation would be required to implement the package. He confirmed that if a Bill was needed there would not be time to get through a Second Reading before Easter recess. If a Bill was needed of course time would be found for it. Whether that would be this session or next session would be for the Cabinet to decide. Recent events in Northern Ireland had not made it more or less likely that a package would be put together. The fact that there were a number of former Ulster Ministers in the Cabinet was found a help rather than a hindrance by Jim Prior. The Lord President would not characterise the Cabinet discussions in terms of differences between Ministers. It was a case rather of assessing the weight to be attached to, and timing of, strategies. By their nature the decisions on strategy were very difficult. Given the situation in Northern Ireland any package would obviously be criticised from several quarters. But the Lord President drew attention to the fact that all parties had indicated their willingness to take part in elections even if they disagreed with overall package. The Lord President would not be drawn on the options now before the Cabinet. He indicated, though, that it was unlikely that some form of assembly would be set up without legislation with a view to legislating later to give this assembly greater powers.

DEFENCE: TRIDENT

On the Trident deal the Lord President indicated that British sub-contracting should be seen in the overall context of the fact that both submarines and missile warheads would be built here. It was hoped that British sub-contractors could also participate in the production of the missile and the Defence Secretary had hoped to create the necessary conditions to allow this. Congress obviously could be a problem. Even if this problem could be overcome British contractors would have to win in the market place. An agreement would be signed similar to Polaris. UK Government would only be able to pull out at vast expense but we were not contemplating such a possibility. The Lord President firmly believed that any incoming administration, whether Conservative or not would, judging Trident on its merits, decide to retain it. It would be damned expensive to pull out.

DEFENCE: ENDURANCE

The Lord President said he thought Endurance would still be in service when the next Defence was held. Certainly Endurance might not now return quickly to UK waters.

DEFENCE: RHINE ARMY

The Lord President did not see the idea of John Wilkinson (Conislip pps Nott) for pulling 25,000 out of Rhine Army and replacing with Spanish troops as being an option worth considering. The affect on our

allies of such a move would be devastating. It always had to be remembered that the UK could not be defended in isolation.

LIVING STANDARDS

The Lord President did not feel it was for him to quantify the likely rise or fall in living standards in the immediate future. He thought it possible for a government to win an election even if living standards were falling.

ELECTIONS

The Lord President did not see any merit in "saving up" by-elections and holding several on one day.

MR HOSKYNs

Asked if he would miss Mr Hoskyns, the Lord President indicated that Mr Hoskyns was not a member of his staff and the matter was one for the Prime Minister. On the occasions when the Lord President had met Mr Hoskyns his advice had been most welcome and illuminating.

PB