

BUSINESS

Asked if there would be a further debate on the Falkland Islands situation, the Lord President said this would depend on whether something happened in the South Atlantic or Washington/New York. It could be arranged if necessary though inconvenient.

Criminal Justice Bill

The Lord President said that on Tuesday he expected a business motion designed to conclude business at 10. There would be Votes on new clauses to the Bill which would cover both the general and qualified reintroduction of capital punishment. Apart from the general reintroduction Vote he anticipated Votes on capital punishment in the case of murders of policemen, or in the course of an act of terrorism. He thought there would be three Votes altogether and they would be free Votes. As to the consequences if the Votes went in favour of the reintroduction, the Lord President felt matters would not rest there. There would be formidable consequences in terms of new legislation. The Lord President was anxious not to anticipate what the Home Secretary might say in the debate but he was sure that a Vote changing the situation could not produce an instant change in the law. He did not believe the Vote would produce a different result from last time, and for this conclusion he leant partly on the evidence of the Vote on terrorism in an Irish context.

Northern Ireland Bill

On the Second Reading of the Northern Ireland Bill, the Lord President acknowledged that he thought a number of Conservative MPs would vote against though he thought the number would not go out of the teens. He commented that the real question was how the Opposition would stand. He felt that it was voices and not votes that would impede the Bill's progress. On the question of a guillotine, he suggested there was no precedent for a guillotine on a constitutional Bill of this character in a Northern Ireland context on the Floor of the House. However, he could not be categorical about the question of a guillotine.

It was put to the Lord President that he had no faith in the Bill himself as Mr Powell had suggested, and Mr Biffen asserted that he was concerned to get it on the Statute Book. He recognised all the opportunities for opposition and problems of the Committee Stage being conducted on the Floor of the House and he thought the opponents would adopt the tactic of playing it for as long as possible.

Programme

Asked about the extent to which the business of the House had been affected by the Falkland Islands' debates etc, the Lord President said the first casualty would be the time available for recess rather than the legislative programme. So far he thought some days of recess might be lost.

FALKLAND ISLANDS

Asked how serious a negotiation was now going on, the Lord President said the British response was designed to be constructive and to give a lift to negotiations. He outlined the fact that there were two separate though complementary sets of proposals. We said the British anxiety was that the Argentines would play for time, particularly in view of the worsening climatic conditions in the South Atlantic. However it was necessary to test how real were the prospects of a solution. We were

LOBBY BRIEFING

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LORD PRESIDENT

anxious to establish Argentine's good faith in the suggested negotiations. Any negotiations we conducted would have to have regard for Resolution 502. The Lord President would not comment on timetable or substance.

Asked about the British long-term aims, he said the Government was anxious to secure circumstances in which there could be a settled determination of the future status of the Islands, and acknowledged that trusteeship was one option. Britain had been engaged in discussions on the future status of the Islands and we wished to return to a situation where we could have those kind of discussions. He did not agree that there had been a change of emphasis on the paramountcy of the wishes of the Islanders. That factor was still very much around.

Asked about the role of the Cabinet, the Lord President did not wish to comment on what goes on in Cabinet and said there was a proper involvement of Ministers. He was satisfied with the arrangements whereby the smaller group of Ministers operated.

Asked why the enthusiasm for the Peruvian proposals had grown so rapidly when they had been talked down previously, he said he was not aware of a lack of enthusiasm at any stage.

Asked to characterise the present mood as one of pessimism or optimism, he said that in diplomacy one always travels hopefully. He acknowledged there was a time limit. It was to our adversary's advantage to protract the proceedings.

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