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ELP

20.5.82

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20.7.82

Mrs Beavis - DS11

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

THIRD MEETING WITH EDITORS ON FALKLANDS EMERGENCY

1. PUS held a third meeting with Editors on 6 May to discuss media coverage of the Falklands Emergency. A list of those who attended is at Annex A.

2. PUS said that since the last meeting the pace of events in the South Atlantic had quickened and, as suggested, MOD had opened up a full press facility in the Concourse Hall. He was conscious that news was sometimes slower to be released than was desirable. This was due partly to the distances involved and partly to the need to be sure of the facts before making statements. As an additional service to the media, MOD would begin to give specialised background briefings for groups of correspondents.

3. Continuing, he said that there were a number of points causing MOD concern. These included:

a. Reporting of assistance from third countries (which could put this in jeopardy).

b. Speculation about future operational plans and interception of Argentine communications.

c. Harassment of families of Service casualties.

4. In response, Editors expressed concern about the paucity of information being provided by MOD. They appreciated the difficulties caused by long distances and limited communications capacity, but there was a risk of the UK starting to lose public and international sympathy through appearing to be holding back on news when the Argentines had no hesitation about deluging the media with misleading and inaccurate information. Particular points mentioned were:

a. Delays in announcing that operations had taken place (eg sinking of General Belgrano).

b. Inability of MOD to confirm or deny stories originating from overseas (eg the previous day US sources had been reporting - erroneously - a naval battle in the South Atlantic; MOD did not repudiate this but merely said it "had no information").

c. The return of photographs and film from the Task Force and South Georgia was non-existent.

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5. PUS undertook to see what could be done to improve the service in these areas.
6. A number of Editors asked what lay behind recent Ministerial criticism of UK press coverage.
7. Another problem raised was that certain organisations had correspondents with forward elements of Task Force near the Falklands and had good access to news, while others had correspondents only in Canberra off Ascension who were producing very little. It was suggested that reports might be pooled for all UK media. [This did not meet with an immediate response from those Editors with well-placed correspondents, but after the briefing the BBC and ITN offered to make their reports available to press through PA]. A plea was made for greater access for major regional newspapers.
7. It was suggested that any harassment of families could be avoided by MOD providing pictures of the Servicemen concerned. This had solved a similar problem for the Army in Northern Ireland.
8. It was agreed to hold a further meeting in about one week's time.

Comment

While exchanges at the meeting were good-natured, there was clearly a good deal of disquiet on the part of Editors and criticism of the speed and quantity of news provided by MOD. There was a clear feeling that the press was being criticised by Government but inadequately provided with information.

S Webb

S WEBB
PS/PUS

7 May 1982

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External:

D J Wright Esq, Cabinet Office
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SUBJECT: PUS Editors' Meeting

VENUE: HR 27 MOD MB

DATE: May 6, 1982

TIME: 1750 for 1800

ANNEX

Newspaper, Agency, etc	Reporters	Photography	Other details
BBC External Services	Ken Brazier		
BBC TV	Alan Protheroe	A/DG	
BBC Radio	John Wilson Larry Hodgson.		
Daily Telegraph	Wm. Deedes		
Financial Times	G. D. Owen		
Guardian	Peter Preston		
IRN	Peter Thornton		
Daily Mail	David Tyler	Deputy Editor	
PA	David Chipp		
Daily Express	Chris Ward		
ITN	David Nicholas		
Sunday Express	Mike Toner	Political Editor.	
Sunday Telegraph	John Thompson		
Sunday Times	Frank Giles		
Daily Mirror	Peter Thompson	Deputy Editor	
Economist	Andrew Knight		
Star	Brian Hitchens		
News of the World	Derek Jameson.		
Sunday People	Nick Lloyd or Barrington,	Associate Editor.	
Mail on Sunday	Anthony Shrimley,	Associate Editor.	
Reuters	Stewart	Chief Correspondent	
OBSERVER	IAN LINDSEY-SMITH	EXECUTIVE EDITOR.	
NEWSPAPER CONFERENCE	Mr McDonald	CHAIRMAN	
TIMES	FRED EMERY	EXECUTIVE EDITOR	
BBC	PETER WOON	NEWS EDITOR.	

