

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 11.00 date: 13.5.82

PRIME MINISTER'S DAY

The Prime Minister will be working at No 10 and will be in the House this afternoon.

At 9.30am she chaired a meeting of the Group of Ministers concerned with the Falklands (Home sec., Foreign Sec., Defence Sec., Chancellor, CDS and the Attorney General).

At 11.00am she chaired a meeting of the Cabinet. Parliamentary Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Community Affairs, Legislative Programme. All expected except Mr Howe and Mr Younger. The Attorney General attended.

QUESTIONS

At 3.15pm the Prime Minister will be in the House for Questions.

The Prime Minister is expected to be present in the House for the start of the Falkland Island Debate.

IN THE HOUSE

STATEMENTS

There are no statements.

DEBATES

The adjournment debate on the Falklands will start after Business Questions with Mr Pym to open and Mr Nott to wind up.

ANSWERS OF INTEREST

No 133 Written 4.00pm: Mr Antony Buck to ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is intended to call out any US Reservists in connection with the situation in the Falkland Islands. (Answer will say no immediate large scale call out but soon may need to call out a small number of specialists from RN and Royal Marine reserves).

No 135 Written 4.30pm: Mr Tony Durant to ask the S/S Environment when he will be announcing the outcome of the review of the operation of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 in England and Wales. (Answer will announce the outcome - DoE will make details available in lobby at 4.30pm).

No 137 Written 4.30pm: Mr John Farr to ask the S/S Environment when he expects to be able to issue further advice on the problem of defects in Airey hosues. (Answer will say Research Establishment will be issuing technical guidance - DoE details available in lobby at 4.30pm).

FALKLAND ISLANDS

UN Talks

We brought the lobby up to date on the latest developments in New York. We told them not to be too optimistic; the position overnight was that they were in the thick of negotiations, grappling with a range of difficult problems. There was still a lot of hard work to be done, and it was too soon to see a clear pattern emerging or to predict a successful outcome. We told the lobby that a number of things had to be cleared away.

We said this morning's Meeting of Ministers concentrated on diplomatic measures.

We could not at this stage seek to clarify the details of the Secretary General's negotiations, we said we had not yet received a synthesis, the Sec. General had not put both sides together and we would not expect to receive details for another few days.

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We said that after last night's United Nations' negotiations, the Argentines could seek to soften their line, but based on probability of all the quotes from the Argentines it was impossible to predict.

We suggested that any reports that the Argentine had shifted their ground on sovereignty should not be taken seriously.

Reports by Argentine officials that sovereignty is not a precondition were probably used for public relations purposes. The junta believes it has the right of sovereignty; there is no sign that they intend to change that and to withdraw rapidly at the same instant.

Asked whether Cueller would be allowed the time he needs we said we trusted Cueller's judgement. The Government felt he was genuinely trying hard to achieve a settlement.

Asked about this afternoon's debate we said we expected Mr Pym to dismiss the idea of a sell out; discussions are continuing, the UK is earnestly seeking a negotiated settlement. We told the lobby the fundamental problems remain that there should be no ceasefire without withdrawal and no prejudgement of the outcome of the negotiations.

We could not agree that Mr Pym would be more optimistic during today's debate. Yesterday Mr Pym said he was trying to punctuate the affair and did not offer optimism. We told them it was his choice to give a short statement after yesterday morning's meeting of Ministers and he may wish to do so again today after Cabinet.

We confirmed that the PM was aware of the concern of backbenchers which is not unprecedented when negotiations are so detailed, but we could not confirm that the PM had received any letters from them.

We told the lobby that the PM had received 10 letters in support of the Government's handling of the situation for every one against.

We do not know of any MoD statement today.

We said Col. Astiz was still on the Ascension Island and had not yet been handed over to the Red Cross.

We expected to receive, in a few days time, the report of the Board's enquiry into the Argentine prisoner's death.

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