

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 4.00

date: 25.5.82

This morning's lobby was repeated.

The Lobby Chairman expressed his distress over the Guardian leader of that morning which had talked about "secret briefers across the road from the MoD" and "the Downing Street version", the implication being that there was a difference in briefing between No 10 and MoD. The Lobby Chairman asserted that our Sunday lobby briefing did not contradict that given by the MoD and he paid tribute to our efforts in "fighting valiantly" on behalf of press and tv. He took exception to the attack on us. He also pointed out that lobby rules applied to editors and leader writers. We said that contrary to some suggestions we had not been rebuked and we thought it best to forget the matter.

CROWN AGENTS

We said that CFRs would be available at 9.30 the following morning of the Report of the Crown Agents Tribunal. At 3.30pm copies would be available in the Gallery together with the Prime Minister's answer to a written PQ. We reminded the lobby that this was the 3rd report on the Crown Agents covering their rather chequered history.

SOUTH ATLANTIC FUND

Following Mr Nott's announcement of the South Atlantic Fund we said that if the press needed an address where donations could be sent they should give: South Atlantic Fund, Ministry of Defence, Archway Block South, Old Admiralty Building, London SW1. We said that a trust deed was being drawn up and we thought the aim was to administer the Fund through existing charities and range as widely as possible over the personnel involved, both servicemen and families. The Falkland Islanders themselves, we thought, were not covered by this Fund.

ASTIZ

In response to questions on Astiz we said he was being brought back to the UK because it was not convenient to keep him on Ascension until his repatriation. He was returning to the UK by sea. We would observe the Geneva Convention strictly and under this, of course, there was no obligation to repatriate until the end of hostilities. There was however the question of the French and Swedish interest and a legal view was being taken on whether prisoners can be interviewed under these circumstances. We did not think he would be willing to submit to questions.

UN

Asked what instructions our Ambassador at the UN had been given on how to deal with relations there he said he did not need many new instructions. The Group of Ministers had considered the UN situation that morning. There was a lot of activity at the UN, but the PM had left people in no doubt what would happen if an unsatisfactory resolution was brought forward.

On the question of Mr Pym's remarks about being "always ready to negotiate through the UN" we pointed out that circumstances had somewhat changed. We could not foreclose any possibility but there was a military operation now in hand to get the Argentines off the Islands and since they showed no sign of going voluntarily there seemed little point in talking about negotiations.

SOUTH AFRICAN SUPPLIES TO ARGENTINA

We repeated that our concern over arms supplies to Argentina had been made known generally. We understood that South Africa had denied the latest reports about sales to Argentina.

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THE POPE

We said we expected Cardinal Hume to make a statement later that day. We expected him to say that the visit was certainly on and that the Pope would see the Queen but no members of the Government. He might also say that the Government offer to withdraw its limited involvement in this Pastoral visit had been helpful. The Government was quite happy to proceed in that way. The Pope would be received as a Head of State and the FCO would be able to give details of that. Asked why, as a Protestant country, we should go along with all this quite naturally, we said; "Why not?". The Pope had millions of his flock here. Why should he not visit them?

DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

We thought this would not be published until the Falkland Islands operation was over. We did not agree that there would be major changes of substance. The world had not changed. The Soviet Union still constituted the major threat.

EC

We expected the Foreign Secretary to open and the Chancellor to wind up the following day's debate. There had been no statement following the Foreign Affairs Council and clearly the Foreign Secretary would bring the House up to date. The Budget settlement we regarded as fair though it was not as much as we would have liked. However the Government had obtained an extra 50 million ecus, insurance mechanisms, a discussion of the future of the Luxembourg Compromise and a commitment to sort out the Budget issue before the end of November. We had thought it made sense to obtain a long-term agreement to run for 4 or 5 years but had acknowledged that if that was not possible we were prepared to settle for a 3rd year under the 1980 provisions. If the settlement was looked at over the 3-year period it would be seen to have been a very good deal.

ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONS

Asked how we were to demonstrate our dissatisfaction with the Irish if discussions were to continue we pointed out that the PM in her answer of the previous day had expressed disappointment. We had not said at what pace we would proceed with talks. At the European Council in March it had been said that we could not go to Dublin earlier than July. We would now wait and see.

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