

# LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 4.10 PM date: 26.5.82

The morning Lobby was repeated with the addition of two answers of interest which came to our notice after morning Lobby. These were:

No 110 Mr Nick Budgen: To ask the Minister for Trade, when the Monopolies and Mergers Report on the supply of motor car parts is to be published and if he will make a statement.

No 113 Mr Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, when he expects the report of the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People to be published.

In both cases publications had been announced and should already be with the Lobby.

We confirmed that the meeting of Ministers concerned with the Falkland Islands lasted just over one hour this morning.

## MR NOTT'S STATEMENT

We said that one of the overnight worries about the Argentine attack was the level of casualties. We acknowledged the Lobby's concern about the delay in giving details such as the names of the ships involved and the numbers of casualties. We drew attention to Mr Nott's remarks on this subject and said that it was a most difficult decision and we had great sympathy with MoD's dilemma over the issue. It has been MoD's tendency lately to give as much information as they can quickly, because they have been under pressure to do so. If they wait until they are sure of all the facts they are accused of covering things up but the sort of information they can give quickly is often inadequate, as it was last night. We said the MoD would be having another look at the problem to see if they can "stand families down" by naming ships quickly. One of the dangers of giving immediate information about success or otherwise of an attack by the enemy could be to invite another wave to finish the job off, which could greatly hinder the rescue operation, or getting a crippled ship out of the danger zone. We noted the Lobby's comments and said we would feed them back to MoD. We also noted complaints that it was taking relatives of Task Force personnel 6 to 7 hours to get through to the special telephone numbers published by MoD.

## ATLANTIC CONVEYOR

We said that the loss of the container ship was very unfortunate but not crucial. We confirmed that there were no Harriers left on board but that the ship was not empty when abandoned. We said that they should draw their own conclusions about what was left on her but should not overplay its importance.

## MAINLAND ATTACKS

We had no evidence of any intention of attacking mainland and advised that any invasion of Argentina's sovereign territory would widen the conflict and would give an excuse for other parties to get involved which some of them were waiting for. Ministers held the view that bombing mainland bases would not shorten the conflict. But Mr Nott has not absolutely ruled out any future action which may be necessary.

## PORT STANLEY

There was no reason to expect any assault on Port Stanley tonight. We thought it was better not to advertise our presence or intentions on that subject. When asked if it would be days or weeks we said we were

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going to take Port Stanley in our own time, in our own way and with maximum efficiency. The word efficiency could apply to both time and lives. But we hoped that it would turn out to be a matter of days. The conclusion could be drawn that West Falklands was not important and Port Stanley and its surroundings was what mattered.

We were not prepared to talk about the whereabouts of the QE2. It contained troops who would be a fighting force or a garrison force, according to requirements.

We corrected this morning's statement about where and when the Prime Minister learned about the Coventry. She was actually told about it by Mr Nott in the House of Commons. We confirmed that yesterday was not a good day for the Task Force but was perhaps less grim than we had portrayed it earlier.

JL