

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 11 AM date: 16.6.82

PRIME MINISTER'S DAY

The Prime Minister is working at No 10 all day.

At 10.00 am she chaired a meeting of the group of Ministers concerned with the Falklands (Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Home Secretary, Chancellor of the Duchy, the Attorney General and the CDS).

PUBLICATIONS

At 2.30 pm the Law Commission Report on the Classification of Limitations in Private International Law.

At 3.30 pm Report of the Charity Commission for England and Wales 1981.

At 3.30 pm CFRs will be available for publication on Thursday at 3.30 pm of the Grieve Report (Study of the Administration of Sheriffdoms in Scotland).

PRESS NOTICE

Announcement of the revised timetable for the Prime Minister's visit to the United Nations next week. (13 seats are still available for the press on the flight.)

IN THE HOUSE

There are no statements today.

ANSWERS OF INTEREST

No 13 Oral: Mr Philip Whitehead to ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations for a Channel Tunnel. CFRs were available at 9.30 am today of the Fixed Channel Link Report of UK/French Study Group. (Answer will say that before reaching a decision the Government has asked the Group to examine the organisational, legal and financial arrangements. Press Notices available in the Gallery.)

No 88 Written 3.30 pm: Mr Robert Atkins to ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish guidance on local consultation arrangements between the community and the police; and if he will make a statement. (Answer will announce guidelines after discussions since the Scarman Report with community groups, education etc. Press notices available in the Gallery.)

The Secretary of State for Environment will hold a Press Conference at 11.30 am today on proposals to set up an ancient monuments and historic buildings agency in England.

FALKLANDS

We said that Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, Commander in Chief Fleet, would give a Press Conference at Northwood at 3pm.

We said that we had as yet no confirmation from the Argentine Junta that they had accepted a total cessation of hostilities. Pressure was being maintained diplomatically through the representative powers (the Swiss and the Brazilians) and we were hoping for a positive answer. The surrender that had been accepted was for East and West Falkland. We now sought a clear understanding and public statement from the Argentines that they would accept total cessation of hostilities.

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Quoting from Admiral Woodward's message to the Press, we emphasised that the plight of the Argentine prisoners taken on the Islands was being underlined to Governments. There was a need for early action. The 15,000 troops were found to be suffering from malnutrition, exposure which in some cases amounted to hypothermia, trench foot, illness etc brought on by a lack of food, pure water, adequate clothing, shelter and sanitation. Asked if we thought the Junta might be happy to leave the British with this problem and then blame us for the plight of their men, we said they were Argentine people, their Government was responsible for them and they were in this condition when we found them.

The Task Force had its own sources of supply. There was no shortage of food or medical supplies but these extra 15,000 prisoners constituted a considerable additional burden. The problem was lack of shelter and sickness in winter conditions on the edge of the Antarctic. Clearly there were a number of options, the easiest being to return them home by sea or air as quickly as possible. There were two or three Red Cross people in the Falklands who had gone there primarily to concern themselves with the civilian population of the Islands. Obviously they could now also take an interest in the welfare of the prisoners. We were concerned that there should be swift humanitarian action. To suggestions that there could be a temporary ceasefire to allow for the evacuation of prisoners, we said we were looking for full assurances from the Argentines and we would certainly keep some of the most important prisoners if we received no such assurances.

We saw no prospect of a meeting between UK and Argentine Ministers.

A visit by the Prime Minister to the Falkland Islands could not be ruled out but there was nothing planned at present.

We thought Rex Hunt would return to the Islands as soon as arrangements could be made.

We had no knowledge of an imminent change in Secretary of State for Defence.

On the question of the inquiry into how the situation of the Argentine invasion came about, we ruled out both High Court judges and former Prime Ministers as members but agreed that they would have to be Privy Councillors. We did not think the inquiry could be held in public - certainly not all of it - because clearly questions of intelligence would be particularly important.

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