



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

4 October 1984

*M. brief forward
for briefing before
Anglo-French
summit. CD 4/10.*

Dear Charles,

Comments by the French Prime Minister on Britain

Our Ambassador at Paris has recently reported some disobliging remarks made by the French Prime Minister in a recently published interview in one of France's best-selling Sunday newspapers. I enclose his letter of 19 September which gives details. We understand that M. Fabius again treated UK economic policy as a negative example when he spoke on the Antenne 2 television channel on the evening of 26 September, contrasting American success in reducing unemployment with Britain's experience, in order to make the point that the British example was unfortunately more relevant to France than the American.

Sir John Fretwell has written to Fabius to draw his attention to the more positive aspects of the recent performance of the UK economy. He will be writing again in response to the remarks made in the TV interview. Sir John has recommended that there should be no further public response by HMG to these remarks, which we should treat as not meriting further attention. We agree with this advice. We also support the Ambassador's suggestion that the Prime Minister should take the first available opportunity to talk to M. Fabius about the performance of the British economy. There will be such an opportunity at the bilateral Summit in Paris, or the immediately following Conference in Avignon, at the end of November.

In the meantime, our Embassy will of course continue to look for opportunities to impress upon leading French socialists the realities of life in this country, and the economic achievements of recent years.

Yours ever,

Len Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

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RESTRICTED

BRITISH EMBASSY,
PARIS.

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

19 September 1984

M R H Jenkins Esq
AUSS
FCO*Den Ireland,*

COMMENTS BY FABIUS ON BRITAIN

1. I enclose a copy of an interview with Fabius which appeared in the Journal du Dimanche of 16 September. The point of interest is the second segment in the second column, where Fabius, responding to a question about Chirac, comments ungraciously about Britain. The key extract reads: "He (Chirac) is seeking to recover part of his electorate. For that purpose he is using ideological language: the neo-liberalism of Mr Reagan and Mrs Thatcher. He promises us the best of America, but he would bring us the worst of England. America has formidable capacities, but it is a continent which cannot be compared with France. If one wished to copy everything from America one would risk in reality finding oneself back in the English situation." This segment of the interview was picked up and repeated in Le Matin and Le Monde, but in both cases with reference to Fabius' view on Chirac, not his views on Britain, which presumably did not seem to either paper to call for comment.

2. I wrote to Fabius on 17 September (copy enclosed) to let him know that his remarks had not gone unnoticed and to put on record one or two points about the British economy which I thought it would be useful to register with him. I have not yet had a reply but will let you know if I receive one.

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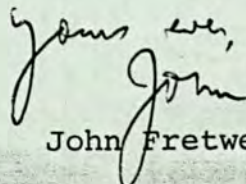


3. There are two points you may wish to consider:-

(a) Should anything more be said to indicate official displeasure with Fabius' remarks? The French themselves are ultra-sensitive to anything which can be construed as official criticism by a foreign government of their economic performance, but I do not think their example is one we would necessarily wish to follow. A better stance for us, I would suggest, is that we are sufficiently confident of our achievement not to over-react to comments of this sort. And the French would probably claim that Fabius only referred to the "English situation" without actually characterising it: it is up to the reader to decide for himself whether it is good, bad or indifferent. On balance I would recommend that from the point of view of a public response we treat Fabius' remarks as not meriting further attention or comment.

(b) Should we nevertheless do more to try to impress the facts on Fabius himself? His remarks suggest to me that he has absorbed and takes for granted the picture which many Frenchmen have of Britain as a nation still in decline and suffering in particular from massive unemployment and widespread de-industrialisation as a direct consequence of present policies. We have had a somewhat better press over the last 18 months, but perhaps that has not got through to Fabius.

4. If plans for the Franco-British Council meeting in Avignon go ahead as now envisaged the Prime Minister may see quite a lot of Fabius: they will presumably sit together at the dinner; and as Fabius is keen to project himself on the foreign policy scene he may want to take the opportunity to have a session of talks with the Prime Minister and possibly even to escort her on a visit in or near Avignon. On the pattern of the last Anglo-French Summit in Paris, he might also have hosted a lunch for the Prime Minister on the same day at Matignon. Unless some new subject of absorbing interest arises, the Prime Minister might like to use this opportunity to talk to Fabius in some depth about the performance of the British and French economies. She might indeed seize the bull by the horns and say she is aware of his doubts about the effect of her policies and about "la situation anglaise". I believe this would be educational for Fabius and of real benefit in giving him a better understanding of Britain. What he said in the interview was perhaps only a throw-away line, but the degree of misunderstanding of British affairs which lies behind it is rather disturbing.

Yours ever,

 John Fretwell

