

PRIME MINISTER

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cc. Mr. Whitmore ✓  
Mr. Vile (Cabinet Office)

Debate on Blunt

The Chancellor of the Duchy announced that there would be a day's debate on the case of Anthony Blunt, on a Motion for the Adjournment, on Wednesday.

Mr. Foot said that it was right to re-arrange the Business in this way. He asked for a further discussion through the usual channels about the Business at the beginning of next week - when the Opposition would like to have two days in succession on the economic situation, one of them a Government day and the second their postponed Supply Day.

Mr. Beith called on the Government to suspend all proceedings on the Protection of Information Bill, which he said should be retitled the Protection of Incompetence and Cover-Up of Treason Bill. Mr. St. John-Stevas congratulated him on his lurid phrase-making and said that the Bill was clearly relevant to Wednesday's debate.

Mr. Hamilton said that the debate on Wednesday should be extended until 11 or 12 and that it was essential that Members should be able to discuss the Protection of Information Bill. The Leader of the House said that he did not think there was a case for extending the debate beyond 10 o'clock, and that it was for the Speaker to determine what was in order. Mr. Alex Lyon congratulated the Government on diverting attention from its economic measures. The Leader of the House said that he was grateful for the compliment.

Mr. Michael English asked for early passage of the Motions on Select Committees, which were blocked by John Farr on Friday. Rumour has it that there will be a concerted attempt to put the Blunt case on the agenda for the Home Affairs Select Committee, and I will seek advice from the Leader of the House about this.

/ Mr. Leadbitter

Mr. Leadbitter said that he was grateful to the Government for responding so quickly to the call for a debate. He wanted Ministers to indicate on Wednesday whether there would be a full inquiry. The Chancellor of the Duchy said that you had been more open and responsive than any of your predecessors in this matter. Mr. Callaghan invited him to withdraw that statement, and Mr. St. John-Stevas said that he was praising the present Prime Minister and not condemning any of her predecessors.

Mr. Price said that it would be intolerable if the scope of the debate proved to be limited to the trivial aspects of the case. We needed to discuss the proper control of the security services and it should be clear in advance that the House could discuss every aspect of the case. Mr. St. John-Stevas said that it seemed to him to be possible to raise all sorts of aspects within the rules of order and that the House normally treated these subjects very seriously.

Mr. Robin Cook said that the Protection of Official Information Bill had been deeply discredited by the events of the last few days. Mr. Skinner said that the Prime Minister should disclose fully why she had turned into a "common or garden nark in tipping off Anthony Blunt". Mr. Cryer said that the Home Secretary should take part in the debate and give his views on the Information Bill; and that the Home Secretary or Prime Minister should tell the House the form of inquiry which had been decided.

The Leader of the House said that these points should wait for the debate itself and that he understood that the speakers would be the Prime Minister and the Attorney General.

Finally, the Speaker clarified the position about the topics which would be in order by referring to Standing Order 16, which - paraphrased - says that the Speaker may permit reference to legislative action in a Debate on the Adjournment notwithstanding the practice of the House which forbids this. He hinted heavily that he would not stand in the way of discussion of the Official Information Bill on Wednesday.

**N. J. SANDERS**

# LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 11.00 date: 19/11/79

## PRIME MINISTER'S ENGAGEMENTS

The Prime Minister is working at No 10 this morning. She meets President Giscard (Kensington Palace helipad) at 1225. Fourth in annual Summit series, last one in UK: Chequers, December 1977. Programme: small working lunch No 10; tete-a-tete; enlarged session 1600 (including Foreign Secretary, Lord President of Council, M. Francois Poncet and M. Monory). M. Barre, French Prime Minister, not attending because of urgent Parliamentary business. Dinner at Downing Street this evening. Briefing at No 12 Downing Street at 1800.

## BLUNT

Points on Blunt included:

- i HMG will probably offer to initiate a Debate on Wednesday in HMG time. PM to open, Attorney General probably to wind-up. Business statement later today should clarify.
- ii Written PQs on Order Paper for PM tomorrow: Answers not likely to be as substantial as last Thursday's.
- iii On Blunt's allegation that statement broke guarantee to him about no publicity, we said that no Government could give such a guarantee. It was a nonsense given a free press. The only guarantee from HMG could be about immunity. The statement was a result of the enormous build-up of speculation about him.
- iv Inquiry: We did not guide the Lobby to expect an inquiry. We realised that last week's statement would produce an enormous number of questions. We were now following through in measured stages. We expected that there would be substantial debate in the H/C which would clarify the major issues. We would then take stock. We had no taste to blacken the dead. It all happened many years ago. It was now more important that the PM should be convinced she knows precisely what is going on and she had been putting herself in that position. We did not want to suffer from the omissions or failures of the past. We did not know if the PM would be seeing Mr Callaghan before the Debate. We thought that previous PMs may in fact want to speak in the Debate.  
  
On the suggestion of an inquiry into procedures, we said that such an inquiry would not be in public; and we suggested that the PM could ~~(satisfy)~~ without an inquiry.
- v Blunt's statement and press conference: We revealed that Blunt's solicitor had asked for a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary which was taking place this morning. We would not be vetting his statement but we would obviously be indicating any elements that might prejudice security. It was obviously hypothetical to speculate about whether or not he might be charged under the OSA if he said anything.
- vi We thought the proposition that the PM could be told "without being told" was very interesting; but we rejected the idea that if the Private Secretary was told the information necessarily became the property of the PM.
- vii On Young and the OSA, we commented that we were surprised how many people have been talking.
- viii We offered no guidance on whether any more names would be revealed officially.

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- ix We re-emphasised that the PM had been taking a close interest in security since her appointment and reminded the Lobby that she knew about Blunt some time during the summer. Civil servants did not need telling that they would be dismissed if they didn't tell her about matters such as this.
- x [Protection of Information Bill: The Lobby didn't ask: if/when they do we could say that the question if/when/how the Home Office proceeds with the Bill is obviously now part of present discussion and is being considered.]

#### PRESS CONFERENCES

We reminded the Lobby about the Northern Ireland Lobby briefing and the Giscard press conference both at 11.00 tomorrow.

#### PAY FOR COUNCILLORS

There is no truth whatever in the story in the 'Daily Star' that Councillors are to be paid £20 a week salaries. The Government's proposals on Councillors' remuneration will be announced when the Local Government Planning and Land Bill is published - probably within two weeks.

[For your information: There will be no salary for Councillors, only slightly increased allowances.]