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MR TURNBULL

Westland:Defence Committee

with AT

Many thanks for your minute of 12 April.

2. I reported to you that, by chance, I found myself sitting next to Mr Michael Mates at a dinner of the Defence Council on Wednesday evening before I saw your minute.

3. Mr Mates recounted to me the events outlined in your minute and its attachments, and said that he thought that Sir Barney Hayhoe's position would be difficult to shift. He said that if the Committee voted to reopen the Westland Enquiry, their first step would be to write to Sir Leon Brittan. Mr Mates thought that, if Sir Leon were to reply endorsing his statement to the House of 27 January 1986 and repeating his full acceptance of responsibility for his Department's actions, this would be the end of the matter. It was clear from what he said that the suggestions in the Clerk's note that Sir Leon Brittan's statement was inconsistent with Sir Robert Armstrong's evidence to the Defence Select Committee had weighed with the Committee a good deal.

4. Like you, I was indignant at Mr Winnick's remarks in the House on Tuesday. Again by chance, I had the opportunity of an informal word about them with the Speaker. But he confirmed that the combined effect of privilege and freedom to use unparliamentary words about non-members of the House is that there is no parliamentary way of preventing MPs from making this kind of remark about civil servants or other members of the public. The only redress is rebuttal, either inside or outside the House; and I am sure that you will agree that in these

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circumstances it would be both pointless and counter-productive to respond to Mr Winnick. Our comfort must be both that his remarks seem to have cut no ice and this is no doubt a sign that the irresponsible use of such words simply debases their credibility, however offensive the words may be in cold print.

HER.B.

ROBIN BUTLER

14 April 1989

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