

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 11.00 date: 28.4.82

PRIME MINISTER'S DAY

The Prime Minister is working in No 10 all day.

At 9.00am the PM chaired a meeting of the Falkland Islands group of Ministers (Home Sec., Foreign Sec., S/S Defence, Chancellor of the Duchy, CDS).

CABINET

At 10.15am the PM chaired a meeting of the Cabinet. Falkland Islands. All present plus Attorney General.

PRIME MINISTER OF THAILAND

At 12 noon the Prime Minister will welcome the Prime Minister of Thailand, General Prem Tinsulanonda who is on an official visit to the UK from 27 to 30 April.

The PM and the General will have talks for an hour before lunch at No 10.

This is the first visit by the General to the UK as PM. He last visited this country in 1979.

He comes here after visiting Belgium and Austria and will go on to France.

The lunch party will include HRH Princess Alexandra and Mr Ogilvy.

IN THE HOUSE

We knew of no statements planned.

PUBLICATIONS

The Report on the work of the Prison Department 1981. (CFRs today at 4.00pm, publication tomorrow at 3.30pm).

ANSWERS OF INTEREST

No 116 Written 3.30pm: Mr Brian Mawhinney to ask the S/S Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the future funding arrangements for Harland & Wolff Ltd. (Answer will indicate further funding for H&W).

No 118 Written 3.30pm: Mr John Corrie to ask S/S Scotland if he is yet able to announce the members of the Islands Committee Inquiry. (Answer will announce names of Chairman and 9 members of the Committee of Inquiry into powers of the Islands Councils, particularly in view of Shetland economic problems).

No 115 Written 5.00pm: Mr Michael Shaw to ask the Foreign Sec. if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 26/27 April. (Answer will report).

NCB

It was not true that Sir Derek Ezra would remain as Chairman for a further 12 months. We were not sure but thought his term of office ended in June; a replacement had not necessarily yet been decided.

FALKLANDS

Inner Cabinet/Cabinet

The inner group met for 75 minutes. It was not putting forward recommendations to Cabinet. Mr Pym returned last night and was present. He would be reporting to Cabinet yesterday's discussion on the Falklands at the FAC. The inner Cabinet operated with the full backing and confidence of Cabinet. It would prepare options and secure the endorsement of the full Cabinet. It therefore had a broad mandate under which it operated but if circumstances changed could always go back to Cabinet. This was the usual way in which Government operated. There would be another Cabinet on Thursday which would consider business other than Falklands.

Haig's Proposals

The American Government put their formal proposals to the Argentine Government yesterday. We had received a text. These were under consideration but not at this morning's Cabinet. We wished to give them mature consideration rather than an immediate judgement. We could not say when we would give any decision on them. We had no knowledge of any Argentine reaction to them. We could not confirm that the Argentine Government had rejected them.

Tactically if the proposals were to be rejected we believed it was always better for the other side to be in the position of making the rejection.

Orders/Operational Details

We were not prepared to comment on any operational matters.

Air Exclusion Zone

This already existed in as much as there was a moving defensive area or amoeba around the task force. An AEZ was always an option to be taken at the appropriate time. We suggested that the lobby should keep an eye on MoD on this. We would not impose an AEZ unless we could enforce it.

Declaration of War

We did not consider ourselves at war although Costa Mendez had made a number of statements, some of which had come close to a declaration. If the Argentine Government formally declared they were at war with us then naturally we would have to consider ourselves at war. We could not say if in these circumstances we would be required to make some sort of pronouncement.

Diplomatic Representation

The Swiss Government were looking after our interests in Argentina; the Brazilian Government were looking after Argentine interests in the UK. We were making diplomatic representations to all Governments on this matter.

Visits

The PM had no plans for further visits to MoD or Northwood but we could not rule out that she might do so.

Communications

We were in touch with the task force through Fleet HQ.

Urgency

We were not necessarily slowing down the pace; the media had assumed events were moving at speed. We had been putting the breaks on slightly and calming down emotions. But this had nothing to do with the exchanges yesterday in the House.

In respect of Mr Foot's performance in the House we did not know if this meant a breakdown of Opposition support for the Government. The Government had not embarked on this operation in the expectation of relying on Opposition support; that was a bonus but the Government had the responsibility of seeing the matter through. Despite Mr Foot's performance this should not be confused with Labour Backbench feeling. We believed Mr Foot was content with the way in which the Government was reporting to Parliament; Mr Steel was perhaps suffering from coalition starvation.

Optimism?

Hope rather than optimism.

UN

We were not to be deflected by any device which might spin out talks and enable the Argentines to remain on the Falklands. The immediate requirement was for Argentine withdrawal as required by the UN Resolution.