

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 11.00 date: 12.5.82

PRIME MINISTER'S DAY

At 9.30am she chaired a meeting of the Group of Ministers concerned with the Falklands (Foreign Sec., Home Sec., Chancellor of the Duchy, Defence Sec., CDS and the Attorney General).

AUDIENCE

At 6.30pm the Prime Minister hopes to have an audience of the Queen.

PUBLICATIONS

Annual Report of 1980/1 of the Historic Buildings Council for England at 10.30am (CFRs yesterday).

IN THE HOUSE

STATEMENTS

No confirmation at present but we would expect Mr Walker to report to the House on the Agricultural Council.

ANSWERS OF INTEREST

No 131 Written 4.00pm: Mr John Lee to ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the salaries of Hon Members. (Answer will give new levels - details will be available in the Lobby at 4.00pm).

No 132 Written 4.00pm: Sir John Biggs-Davison to ask the Prime Minister if she has any further statement to make about the Report of the Top Salaries Review Body. (Answer will announce the Government's decisions on the Report - details will be available in the Lobby at 4.00pm).

FALKLAND ISLANDS

We brought the lobby up to date on the latest developments in New York reminding them that UN Ambassador had talked of the Secretary General's "interesting proposals". He had of course referred them to London and was expecting further meetings during the day. No details had been given and it had been indicated that a few more days would be required. The negotiations had had their ups and downs but it was premature to reach conclusions on the chances of success or failure. Proposals were of course subject to ad referendum of Governments and would have to be put to the British Cabinet.

The Group of Ministers meeting that morning would receive an update on the situation. They would of course look carefully and closely at proposals and would have in mind the problems of dealing with the Argentine regime. The Secretary General was still engaged in refining the ideas of both sides and ministers would more closely define the British position and send comments to be deployed by the Ambassador back in New York. They would be concerned to test the integrity of any ideas being put forward. We confirmed that it was still the British position that there could be no ceasefire without a commitment to a verifiable withdrawal and there could be no prejudgement of longer term negotiations. We could not substantiate the stories of deadline, timetables and ultimatums. The time taken would be dictated by the value of the negotiations themselves.

We were expecting that both still and ty pictures, probably of the South Georgia operation, would arrive at Brize Norton during the early afternoon.

Mr Nott and the Chief of the General Staff would see off the troops on the QE2 at 4.00pm.

-OBBY BRIEFING

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There would also be a press facility at the army post office illustrating efforts to get mail to and from the task force more quickly.

It was possible that Mr Pym would say a few words on his way out of that morning's Ministerial meeting at No 10.

On the question of a debate the following day we thought this was probable on a motion for the adjournment and that Mr Pym would open, Mr Nott wind up, and Mr Healy and Mr Silkin likewise for the Opposition. Asked if this would answer Mr Foot's question about the House having an opportunity to debate our negotiating position we did not encourage that idea and thought the Government would not be revealing details of the negotiations. The debate would be an opportunity to update and there were always backbenchers who had views to air.

We announced that Mr Pym was not now going to the Franco/British meeting in Edinburgh on Friday. This was because M Cheysson would not now be attending and a bi-lateral in London was being arranged. The Prime Minister would on present plans be attending the Party Conference in Perth on Friday and the Franco/British Council on Saturday.

ETB

Department of Employment would issue a press notice announcing the appointment of Sir Richard O'Brien as Chairman of the Engineering Training Board in succession to Mr Scanlon.

Pope

We were not aware of any contact between No 10 and Rome on the question of the Pope's visit. Any question of cancellation or postponement was a matter entirely for the Pope. His visit was not an official visit but of a Pastoral nature.

HC

Mr. Neubert: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing belief that the Argentine Government are deliberately, to their own advantage, trying to spin out the negotiations over the Falkland Islands that are at present being conducted through the Secretary-General of the United Nations? Can she say what has happened in those negotiations since the Foreign Secretary's statement last Friday?

The Prime Minister: The negotiations will take a little time. I must make it clear that the fact that we are negotiating does not close any military options at all. The Secretary-General is pursuing the negotiations vigorously. He has seen our ambassador to the United Nations once or twice each day and also, separately, the representative of the Argentine Government.

There are certain fundamental principles that we cannot fudge in any way. The ceasefire must be accompanied by a withdrawal to a specific timetable and in a comparatively short time. We must make it absolutely clear that the Argentines must not enter into those negotiations in the belief, or on the condition, that by the end of them sovereignty is ceded to them.

Mr. Foot: Since these discussions under the auspices of the Secretary-General are obviously of the very greatest importance, and since the outcome may be of the very greatest importance in the dispute, will the right hon. Lady give a clear undertaking that the House of Commons will have the chance to judge those propositions before the Government takes any final decision?

The Prime Minister: We frequently have debates on the Falkland Islands issue, but the Government must be free and, I believe, are inherently free, to make the best judgment that they can in the situation and, finally, to be accountable to the House of Commons for that judgment.

Mr. Foot: Of course the right hon. Lady's Government is responsible to the House for what they do. We are asking for something different. These are important discussions. As the right hon. Lady indicated in her reply a moment ago, important principles are involved. The Government have made some very wise departures from previous utterances on many of these matters, but the House of Commons has the right to make a judgment on this matter before any decision is taken by the Government that would enlarge the conflict. I ask the right hon. Lady and her Government, who have been very leniently treated by the House on this matter, for that assurance.

Mr. Lee: Why did the right hon. Gentleman not meet the Prime Minister?

Mr. Foot: Because the House has the right to make the judgment. That is why I am asking the right hon. Lady to give the House the chance to judge the outcome of the discussions that are being held under the auspices of the Secretary-General.

The Prime Minister: We have to take our decisions on those discussions. I agree that they are very important, but it is an inherent jurisdiction of Government to negotiate and to reach decisions. Afterwards the House of Commons can pass judgment on the Government.

Mr. Foot: I ask the right hon. Lady to consider this matter afresh. It could be that a decision on these matters made by the Government could utterly frustrate and destroy their outcome altogether. Therefore, I again ask

the right hon. Lady to give the House of Commons the chance to make a judgment before the Government themselves make the final judgment.

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. The Government have this responsibility, will shoulder that responsibility and will stand before this House and defend their decision.

Q2. Mr. Marlow: Asked the Prime Minister whether she will list her official engagements for 11 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marlow: With regard to the Falkland Islands, unlike the Commonwealth and the United States, our Community partners, despite their public utterances, seem to have been flapping around like decapitated chickens. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, unless we have their robust, continuing and wholehearted support, it will go ill with the Community within this country and we might be forced to move against the Community, which neither she nor I would wish to do?

The Prime Minister: I must point out to my hon. Friend that the European Community has given us staunch support right from the beginning of the Falklands campaign. It gave us staunch support by imposing an import ban. It extended it. There are no military exports from the European Community to the Argentine. There are no new export credits, and at present an import ban is in force. The Community will make a decision by the end of this week on whether it should extend that import ban and I hope and believe that it will.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: While the Prime Minister is considering these matters and the exercise of a prerogative that lies in the hands of a Government, will she bear in mind that at no time has this House been informed, or been invited to accept, that there should be any other sequel to the repossession of the Falkland Islands than the immediate and unconditional restoration of sole British administration?

The Prime Minister: I am fully aware of the point that the right hon. Gentleman has made. Sovereignty cannot be changed by invasion. I am very much aware that the rights of the Falkland Islanders were to be governed through the means of a legislative and executive council, and that is what democracy is all about.

Mrs. Sally Oppenheim: If my right hon. Friend has time today, will she watch a recording of last night's "Panorama" programme? Is she aware that for the most part, but not all, it was an odious, subversive, travesty in which Michael Cockerell and other BBC reporters dishonoured the right to freedom of speech in this country? Is it not time that such people accepted the fact that if they have these rights, they also have responsibilities?

The Prime Minister: I share the deep concern that has been expressed on many sides, particularly about the content of yesterday evening's "Panorama" programme. I know how strongly many people feel that the case for our country is not being put with sufficient vigour on certain—I do not say all—BBC programmes. The chairman of the BBC has assured us, and has said in vigorous terms, that the BBC is not neutral on this point, and I hope that his words will be heeded by the many who have responsibilities for standing up for our task force, our boys, our people and the cause of democracy.

Mr. Winnick: Does not the Prime Minister agree that one of the virtues of a political democracy is that radio and television should be independent from constant Government control and interference? Would it not be useful if some of her right hon. and hon. Friends stopped their constant intimidation of the BBC? Perhaps the Prime Minister would take that hint as well.

The Prime Minister: It is our great pride that the British media are free. We ask them, when the lives of some of our people may be at stake through information or through discussions that can be of use to the enemy—*[Interruption.]*—to take that into account on their programmes. It is our pride that we have no censorship. That is the essence of a free country. But we expect the case for freedom to be put by those who are responsible for doing so.

Q4. Mr. Pitt asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pitt: In view of what has happened in the preceding weeks, will the Prime Minister give her views on the wisdom of selling arms to non-NATO and unstable countries?

The Prime Minister: Each and every request for the sale of arms is dealt with separately, and it will continue to be done in that way.

Mr. Body: During the day, will my right hon. Friend indicate the extent to which the Government appreciate the way in which Australia and New Zealand have imposed trade sanctions on Argentina and the manner in which those sanctions were imposed, totally, speedily and unconditionally?

The Prime Minister: Gladly. The Governments of Australia and New Zealand have been absolutely magnificent from the day when the Falkland Islands were invaded. From the very outset they have recognised that pressure must be brought to bear and that the Falkland Islanders wish to have the right to live in their own way under a Government of their own choice.

Mr. Dalyell: Who is there, from Mexico City to Cape Horn, who supports what the task force is doing?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman looks even at some of the resolutions—

Mr. Dalyell: Answer the question.

The Prime Minister:—of the Organisation of American States, he will see that a number of them condemned the use of force. Some of them may well believe in Argentine sovereignty, but they have totally and utterly condemned the use of force. In any case, I am not circumscribed by the views of those countries but by the interests of our people.

Sir Bernard Braine: I thank the Prime Minister for her robust remarks earlier. During the course of her busy day, has she been made aware of the rising tide of anger among our constituents at the media treatment and presentation of enemy propaganda and the defeatist views of an unrepresentative minority? Is she aware that an increasing number of people are telling us that this amounts to a sort of treachery?

The Prime Minister: Our people are very robust and the heart of Britain is sound. I hope that individually they will make their views directly known to the BBC, by their letters and telephone calls.

Mr. Ashton: Will the Prime Minister comment on the reports in *The Sunday Times* two days ago that last Thursday, Fleet Street was promised an announcement by Mr. Ian McDonald at six o'clock that two Harrier jets had gone down but that it was then delayed until nine o'clock because it was polling day and there would have been an effect on the vote?

The Prime Minister: That reason is totally and utterly untrue. Does it not occur to the hon. Gentleman that there are times when we must try to get the names of those who have been killed and inform their relatives before people hear that these things have happened? In addition, there may well be operational reasons why one does not tell the enemy immediately of every loss.

Mr. Montgomery: Will my right hon. Friend try to study, at some time today, the press reports of the demonstration that took place in London on Sunday and which was graced by the chairman of the Labour Party and by the right hon. Member for Bristol South-East (Mr. Benn)? Will she especially examine press reports to the effect that certain people at the demonstration were shouting "Victory for Argentina"? Will she not agree that this crisis has thrown up some strange bedfellows when the extreme Left wing of politics in this country is supporting the Fascist junta in Argentina?

The Prime Minister: Whatever the demonstrations that took place, I have no doubt that the vast majority of our people support our task force and our boys in the South Atlantic, who are trying to provide that our people who are under the heel of the Argentine dictator shall have the right to self-determination and democracy.

Mr. Foot: Some of us on the Opposition Benches have been opposed to the Argentine junta a good sight longer than most Conservative Members. I return to the replies that the right hon. Lady gave on the question of the BBC and some of the broadcasts. This is, of course, concerned with the important matter of how freedom of discussion is to be conducted in this country. Some of us are determined to defend it.

Before the right hon. Lady pursues further her strictures of the BBC, where I am sure people are seeking to do their duty in difficult circumstances, will she take some steps to improve the attitude of some newspapers that support her—the hysterical bloodlust of *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, which bring such disgrace on the journalism of this country?

The Prime Minister: Taking the view that the right hon. Gentleman does of the Argentine junta, I hope that he will support the Government in their every act—

Mr. William Hamilton: No.

The Prime Minister:—to free the people of the Falkland Islands from what he called this "foul and brutal aggression" on the very first day. The media are totally free to discuss and publish what they wish. Equally, as the right hon. Gentleman has demonstrated, we are free to say what we think about them.

Mr. Foot: When the right hon. Lady asks that we should support every act of her Government, I am sure that

she must understand that this cannot be the case. I am sure that, on reflection, she will not wish to press any such claims. I repeat what I said at the beginning. It is far and away the most important aspect of the matter with which we have to deal. Whatever may be the views on the BBC, the newspapers and the rest, this House of Commons is the place where the most important issues of all should be debated. I ask the right hon. Lady once again to give this House the chance of judging what proposals may come from the discussions with the Secretary-General. She owes that to the House of Commons and to the country.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has asked the same question. I give him the same answer.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. As long as it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Dalyell: In supplementary questions, the hon. Member for Essex, South-East (Sir B. Braine) referred, in relation to myself and, I imagine, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ayrshire (Mr. Foulkes), to treachery, and the right hon. Member for Gloucester (Mrs. Oppenheim) referred to dishonour. Some of us who have been in the 7th Armoured Division, who have been gunner operators on tanks and many of whose contemporaries in training were shot up with the King's Royal Irish Hussars in Korea, take it ill to be accused of treachery and dishonour.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was listening carefully to the exchanges. There was no reference to any individual Member of the House. To make doubly sure, I called the hon. Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell) after those questions were asked. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that he was called afterwards. There was no individual charge about any particular persons in the programme, at least no person belonging to this honourable House.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can understand the hon. Gentleman's high feeling but I can deal only with points of order on which I can rule. So far as I am aware, our order has not been breached.

Mr. Dalyell: "Treachery" is something of a serious word. Can I, through you, Mr. Speaker, if he was not referring to myself or to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ayrshire, ask—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he cannot pursue the argument in that way.

Later—

Mr. Dalyell: Normally I am rather relaxed about parliamentary rights, but a charge of treachery—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that matter. If I had thought that the hon. Gentleman had been charged

with treachery I would have intervened at once, but I think the House is aware that there was no personal charge against the hon. Member. Therefore, there is nothing that I can do to ask anyone to withdraw a general remark.

Mr. Dalyell rose—

Mr. Alexander W. Lyon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I understood the question of the hon. Member for Essex, South-East (Sir B. Braine), he referred to those who took part in a television programme last night. Two of the people who took part were my hon. Friends the Members for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell) and South Ayrshire (Mr. Foulkes). In that sense, there was a direct connection to the allegation—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I dealt with that matter to the best of my ability. If a personal accusation had been made, I would have had no hesitation in intervening. I cannot pursue the matter.

Mr. English rose—

Mr. Faulds: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. English: How can anyone be guilty of treason when Her Majesty's Government refuse to accept that Argentina began a war without declaring it?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Faulds: Mr. Speaker, can I ask you to look at another aspect of the use of the word "treachery" in the House of Commons? Some of us saw fingers being pointed at the two hon. Gentlemen at whom the accusation was being made—we saw fingers being raised—which I should have thought was a pretty specific way of making the point. Regardless of that, since the charge of treachery was made at unspecified hon. Members, is it still not an unacceptable use of such a phrase, and would it not be for the good health of the House if the use of that word were to be withdrawn by the hon. Member responsible for using it?

Mr. Speaker: Order. In reply to the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), I agree that it would be in the interests of the House if, during these difficult days when there is severe tension both here and in the country, we tried to avoid the words "treachery" and "treason", and such things, because they advance nobody's argument. I hope that we can now proceed. We shall go on to the business motion.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order—

Sir Frederick Burden: On a point of order—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not taking any more points of order.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Eric Ogden (Liverpool, West Derby): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that it is courteous and the custom in this place that an hon. Member, when he proposes to take certain action at a particular time, tries to give you notice. In doing so last week, I got into certain difficulties. The fact that I have not given you notice now, Mr. Speaker, is not discourtesy but caution.

I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The conduct, progress and direction of the Foreign Secretary's negotiations to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict forced on us by the Argentine invasion and occupation of the British Falkland Islands, the defiance by the Argentine Government of the United Nations Security Council resolution 502 while they have increased their forces of occupation, and the apparent willingness of the Foreign Secretary and his advisers to abandon the three principles of unconditional withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands, the restoration of a British administration for the people of the islands and the right of self-determination for the people of the British Falkland Islands, against the quite specific promises given by the Prime Minister to this House and to the people of the Falkland Islands. All of this, if allowed to continue without this House being able to record what hon. Members believe their rightful concern about the risks now being placed on the British task force by prolonged negotiations, the dangers of a surrender in New York, not an honourable settlement, and the ability of this House, as expressed today to remind the Government that the British Act of Parliament which created the Government of the British Falkland Islands and dependencies cannot be set aside for the convenience of Ministers, however powerful or weak, requires that the House discuss these matters urgently, before the Falkland Islanders are betrayed for a second time with even more disastrous consequences for the freedom and for future of the United Kingdom."

Mr. Speaker: I allowed the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Mr. Ogden) to make his application without notice because I presumed that it arose out of the exchanges this afternoon. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to allow him to move his application. The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the conduct, progress and direction of the Foreign Secretary's negotiations to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict forced on us by the Argentine invasion and occupation of the British Falkland Islands."

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am dealing with an application under Standing Order No. 9.

I listened with great care to the arguments of the hon. Member for West Derby, which he adduced from having listened to the exchanges this afternoon, and which arise out of the matters of this afternoon, but I must rule that his submission does not fall within the provisions of the standing order and therefore I cannot submit his application to the House.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered;

That, at this day's sitting, on consideration of the Criminal Justice Bill, such new Clauses relating to capital punishment as may be selected by Mr. Speaker shall be first considered, and if proceedings thereon have not been completed by Ten o'clock, Mr. Speaker shall then put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the Clause then under consideration and any selected Amendments thereto and thereafter the Questions necessary to dispose of any other of those Clauses, and selected Amendments thereto, which may be brought up at that time.—[Mr. Thompson.]

Q33. Mr. Dover asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

Q34. Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 11 May.

Q35. Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

Q36. Mr. Aitken asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

Q37. Mr. Arthur Davidson asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

Q38. Mr. Bidwell asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

Q39. Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall have further meetings later today. This evening I shall be dining with the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals.

Unemployment Benefit

Q12. Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Prime Minister what percentage of average male earnings was unemployment benefit for a man who had been out of work for two months and was married with two children in May 1979; and how this compares with May 1980, 1981 and 1982.

The Prime Minister: In May 1979 a married man with two children who had previously been on average male earnings would have received unemployment benefit, earnings-related supplement and child benefit which amounted to 59.7 per cent.—£48.49—of the net income of his employed counter-part—a more relevant comparison than with his gross earnings. The corresponding figure for May 1980 is 55.9 per cent.—£55.85; and the provisional figure for May 1981 is 52.2 per cent.—£57.50. A comparable figure for May 1982 will not be available until mid-July. This situation changes significantly if one takes into account the supplementary benefit position. Assuming the two children were under age 5, supplementary benefit scale rates with heating addition and an average rent addition for an unemployed claimant amounted to 53.8 per cent., 54 per cent. and 60.8 per cent. of that net income at May 1979, May 1980 and May 1981 respectively.

Factory Closures

Q13. Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Prime Minister how many hon. Members she has seen on matters relating to factory closures since she last answered oral questions; and how many jobs were expected to be lost in the closures mentioned.

The Prime Minister: I have had no such meetings since 8 May.

Plastic and Rubber Bullets

Q14. Mr. Frank Allaun asked the Prime Minister if she will ensure that rubber or plastic bullets may no longer be used by security forces anywhere in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: No.

Falkland Islands

Q16. Mr. Latham asked the Prime Minister whether she will make a statement on the latest developments over the Falkland Islands.

The Prime Minister: We are continuing serious and intensive efforts to arrive at a peaceful solution through the negotiations being conducted by the Secretary General of the United Nations. At the same time we are maintaining the exclusion zone around the Falkland Islands, and keeping up the diplomatic and economic, as well as military, pressures on the Argentines. Our objective remains, in accordance with Security Council resolution 502, to end the unlawful Argentine occupation and to create the conditions for genuine negotiations on the future of the islands. It is Argentine intransigence which has so far prevented this.

Mr. Arthur Lewis asked the Prime Minister who were the privy councillors to whom she extended an invitation to join her to discuss matters connected with the Falkland Islands difficulties; whether the leaders of all of the political parties were included; and if she will give reasons for her choice.

The Prime Minister: At their request, I have held meetings on privy councillor terms with the right hon. %Members fr Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles (Mr. Steel) and Plymouth Devonport (Dr. Owen); the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell); and the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart). The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition declined my invitation to join the first of these meetings.

South Georgia

Q23. Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the current situation in South Georgia.

The Prime Minister: As I reported to the House on 26 April, British authority was re-established in South Georgia on 25 April. The Argentine troops and civilians captured there have now been taken off the island, as have the British Antarctic survey personnel and the two wildlife photographers. A British presence remains on the islands.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Bodies (Departmental Assistance)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what bodies or organisations, for the day-to-day work or administration of which he does not answer parliamentary questions, receive finance from his Department's Vote.

Mr. Prior: In addition to the non-official bodies and local authorities to which the Northern Ireland