

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 4.00 date: 16.6.82

This morning's lobby was repeated.

On the question of how the prisoners would be returned to Argentina we emphasised that we were seeking a cessation of hostilities assurance from the Argentines and a firm public declaration to that effect. The ideal would be to ship the prisoners straight back to Argentina if that was possible, otherwise other countries such as Uruguay or Brazil could be involved.

There was, we said, enough food at present for everyone considering that our own forces numbered in total 27,000 and we would be provisioned with food and medical supplies sufficient to sustain the additional numbers.

On the question of apparent disparities between previously quoted figures for the numbers of Argentines on the Island and later information emanating from interviews with General Moore we said that we understood MoD were still using the original figures and that all reports indicated the condition of the men to be in accordance with Admiral Woodward's report as published. We emphasised that the problems of malnutrition and illness were what the British troops found when they accepted the surrender.

We believed there were two or three Red Cross representatives who had gone in originally to supervise the Safety Zone around the Cathedral. They could now of course take an interest in all the humanitarian points.

We emphasised that the Task Force had the ships in which to send back the prisoners but the Task Force Commander could not go about that humanitarian business unless he was sure that his forces would not be attacked. This was why the assurance on cessation of hostilities from the Argentines was so important. To suggestions that General Menéndez had given this assurance we said that he had surrendered for East and West Falkland but had no authority to give an assurance on the total cessation of hostilities.

We agreed that we would be happy to send back the bulk of the prisoners in designated vessels and we would want to do this as quickly as possible. But we would have to keep back some special categories, such as officers, if we had no clear and final assurances.

We said there had been no further news on the Inquiry. We did not believe any inquiry could start work before next week.

We had no reason to believe there was any question mark over Mr Nott's future. To suggestions that the original letter from the PM in response to Mr Nott's offer of resignation gave the impression that she would not let him resign "for the time being" we said that we would not encourage this line of thinking. We were not aware of any planned changes in the Government. Asked if Lord Carrington had gone for good we said we would have thought so but we noted that people had said they would be happy to see a role for him. However there was no suggestion that the PM would now persuade him to come back.

We thought Mr Hunt would be going back to the Islands soon as Civil Commissioner. Before the invasion he had had 42 marines under him. That situation had now changed completely and he could clearly not be responsible for the military in the new situation.

On the PM's visit to New York next week we said the journey would be confined to New York and back. We did not envisage any diversion.