

Ref. A086/2109

MR WICKS *one minute*

cc Lord President of the Council
Chief Whip
Mr Ingham

The Westland Report - Media Handling

I have seen Mr Ingham's minute of 16 July.

Winston Churchill 2. As I told you, I met a member of the Select Committee on Defence earlier today, who told me that the leaked accounts of what the Report said about me were greatly exaggerated: he did not think that I should find it nearly as bad as was suggested.

3. Nonetheless, I agree with Mr Ingham that this may well be an occasion on which the Government should publish an immediate initial response on at least some aspects of the Committee's findings. I have made arrangements to consider as a matter of great urgency, as soon as a copy of the Report is available, what that initial response might be.

4. Without knowing exactly what is in the Report, I am inclined to think that the initial response should not try to hit too many targets.

5. On the position of the Cabinet Secretary and the Head of the Home Civil Service, and on the relationship of civil servants to Select Committees, it will be possible to refer across to the relevant paragraphs in the response to the 7th Report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, which is to be published the same day. On the second point, however, we shall need to be a little bit careful if we are not to

invite the rejoinder from the Committee that they were not allowed to get at the civil servants whom they really wanted to question.

6. If it is suggested that some or all of the officials concerned in the affairs of the Solicitor General's letter of 6 January were not adequately proceeded against, I think that it would be right to make some immediate response on that point, including (as Mr Ingham says) immediate and firm expressions of Government confidence in them.

7. I am not sure that there will be much advantage in trying to fault the Committee for over-concentration on the affair of the Solicitor General's letter: in any case, that charge might not easily stick, if the Report is indeed 250 pages long.

8. If the advance leaks prove greatly to exaggerate the substance of the actual Report, we may be able to comment on this point in passing, if we deal with the question of the relationship of civil servants to Select Committees.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

17 July 1986