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Se refiere a:

20MAY82 – House of Commons. Interpelación 1 a Margaret Thatcher.

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Margaret Thatcher House of Commons PQs

Q1. Mr. Ray Powell

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher)

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 be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Powell

Is the Prime Minister aware that the call for a ceasefire in the Falkland Islands is gathering strength nationally and internationally? Will she therefore tell us how many more lives—[Hon. Members: “Reading”]—will be sacrificed to satisfy the lust for blood by the hawks on the Government Benches behind her? Will she tell us when the nation can expect the faith, hope and harmony that she promised three years ago from the steps of 10 Downing Street?

The Prime Minister

A ceasefire without withdrawal would leave the invader in possession of the Falkland Islands and our people under his subjection. That is far from our objective.

Sir Anthony Kershaw

Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the object of this exercise is to restore freedom and the rule of law to the Falkland Islands? Will she ensure that her view of that is not obscured by any Argentine fancy footwork?

The Prime Minister

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Our objective is to restore freedom and the rule of law to the Falkland Islands and we will not be put off by Argentine procrastination.

Mr. David Steel

Will the Prime Minister tell the House, in advance of her speech this afternoon, whether she will be able, in the course of that speech, to inform the House of the terms proposed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations? If that is not possible, can the right hon. Lady give us an idea of when she thinks those terms might be made known to the House?

The Prime Minister

Not in detail, but I shall be able to give some indication of aspects that have yet to be resolved.

Mr. Horder

As President Mitterrand has invited my right hon. Friend to state what is Britain's role within the European Community, will my right hon. Friend tell President Mitterrand that we will not be told by others what lies within our national interest, and that a heavy responsibility now rests with the Community to put right the wrong that it has done?

The Prime Minister

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. What has happened over the Luxembourg compromise is very serious and could be even more serious if majority voting is applied to other aspects of Community work. Our role in the Community is to be a full and equal partner and to be fully entitled to equitable and fair treatment.

Q2. Mr. Parry

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

[column 468]

Mr. Parry

Does the Prime Minister agree that the decision taken in Europe is a kick in the teeth and a sell-out of British interests? Does she further agree that the simplest answer to the present crisis in the EEC would be to take Britain out of the common agricultural policy? Is she aware that that decision would be widely welcomed on Merseyside, in the regions and, indeed, throughout the land?

The Prime Minister

The decision is without precedent and has serious implications. We are full members of the EEC. We intend to remain full members of the EEC and we intend to make our views known and see whether we can reverse that decision about the Luxembourg compromise.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop

Will my right hon. Friend convey to the New Zealand Government this country's widespread appreciation and gratitude for their generous action in support not only of Britain but of the rule of international law, not least by offering to support us with Her Majesty's New Zealand ship "Canterbury" ?

The Prime Minister

Gladly. The New Zealand Government and people have been absolutely magnificent in their support of this country, of the Falkland Islanders and of the rule of liberty and the rule of law. I shall gladly convey that to Mr. Muldoon, who, only yesterday, reminded me "Don't forget. In New Zealand, we are still a member of the same family."

Mr. Foot

I return to the question of the Luxembourg compromise. We shall be discussing the other matters later today. Will the right hon. Lady say whether her answer a few moments ago means that she advocates that we should remain members of the Common Market and of the common agricultural policy, whatever may happen to the Luxembourg compromise? Would she like to have a vote of the House of Commons, following the debate that we are glad will be taking place on this extremely important subject next Wednesday, to sustain her? Does she agree that that might be helpful? Will she guarantee to carry out what the House of Commons votes for?

The Prime Minister

We are a member of the European Community. What has happened over the Luxembourg compromise is very serious. I believe that it is in our interests to continue to be a member of the European Community. The right hon. Gentleman will understand that one needs a little time to see precisely how we should tackle this latest serious situation.

Mr. Ian Lloyd

Since this remarkable document, in the Vote Office, has revealed that Her Majesty's Government, in the interests of peace, have been prepared to carry compromise almost to the point of folly, has not the time come for the House to turn its back on timidity and compromise and to make it clear to the gauleiters of Buenos Aires that when British forces have been committed in a just cause they have always triumphed and the consequences for their opponents have been devastating?

The Prime Minister

As I shall say in my speech later, I do not believe that we have, in that document, compromised any of the fundamental principles that I set out at the beginning—none of them. We were prepared to make certain practical changes that were reasonable if we were to obtain the prize of no further loss of life. But there has been no compromise on fundamental principles.

[column 469]

Mr. Donald Stewart

Does the Prime Minister accept that her reiteration that the Government intend to stay in the Common Market is an indication to her so-called partners that they will get away with anything that they like to try? Will she take a much firmer stand than was evident in the replies of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday—for instance, by going immediately to a 200-mile limit for fisheries?

The Prime Minister

I was merely suggesting that we should have time to think through all the aspects before we propose action. That seems to me a very good principle.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark

Bearing in mind what happened yesterday in the European Common Market, will my right hon. Friend adopt the same robust attitude over this issue as she has so properly adopted over Argentina? If we are to remain members of the Common Market, will my right hon. Friend be just as forthright on that issue?

The Prime Minister

We are entitled to reasonable and fair treatment. I believe that what has happened over the Luxembourg compromise, and the idea that we can go ahead with changes in the CAP without changes in the structure of the budget, is a breach of faith. We must now get changes in the structure of the budget to Britain's advantage.

Mr. McNamara

Will the right hon. Lady explain how the failure of our Community partners to observe the Luxembourg compromise will affect the future of the common fisheries policy? Is it not a fact that, at the end of the year, whatever any of her right hon. and hon. Friends may say, if the right hon. Lady persists in remaining in the community, the Common Market countries can fish up to our beaches, have all our fish, ruin our industry and give us no compensation?

The Prime Minister

I accept that if major decisions are in future to be taken by majority rule this would have a very serious effect on almost every major decision and would seriously affect the future of the Common Market. I ask the hon. Gentleman and the House for time to consider this latest position and to prepare a proper response.

Mr. Rippon

I thank my right hon. Friend for what she has said about our relationship with the European Community. Has my right hon. Friend in mind the terms of the draft Labour manifesto of 1980, published under the authority of the national executive of the Labour Party, of which the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) is the most prominent member, which said——

Hon. Members

Reading.

Mr. Canavan

It is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said in 1972 when he took us into the EEC.

Mr. Rippon

The draft said in paragraph 88——

Hon. Members

Reading.

Mr. Speaker

Order. I expect that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's memory is good enough to sustain him. He has had a look now.

Mr. Rippon

The draft said that we will in no circumstances hand over the Falkland Islands to a regime like the Argentine regime that has no respect for human and civil rights. Does that not reflect in a fair way what is the view of the British people as a whole?
[column 470]

The Prime Minister

I believe that it does reflect the view of the British people as a whole that we should not hand over the Falkland Islands to the dictatorship of Argentina. I believe that we have the people united behind us in that resolve.

Q3. Mr. Kilroy-Silk

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk

Does the Prime Minister agree that one feature of the Falkland Island crisis is the clear demonstration of how quickly and effectively the Government can act when they have the political will to do so? Will the Prime Minister now put the same effort, the same commitment and the same resources into ending unemployment?

The Prime Minister

We are putting every commitment and every effort into ending unemployment, which afflicts the whole of the Western world. This requires not only talking, but the efforts of people themselves to create jobs and work harder.

Sir Patrick Wall

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the veto may prove essential for the future of the British fishing industry? Will she look personally into the question of the common fisheries policy?

The Prime Minister

I am very much aware of that issue. It is one of the very serious aspects of what happened in the taking of a vote by majority rule on the CAP yesterday. Another issue is the future of New Zealand lamb. We are very much aware of this, but we need time to prepare a proper response.

Mr. Harry Ewing

Is the Prime Minister aware that if majority voting in the Common Market is to be the new rule, it means, almost invariably, especially in relation to the common agricultural policy and the possibility of agreement on a common fisheries policy, that the majority vote will act against British interests? Is the Prime Minister seriously suggesting that, in these circumstances, she would continue to want Britain to be a member of the EEC?

The Prime Minister

I am suggesting that we do not dash into any hurried conclusions before we have had time to think these things out. I accept entirely that what happened over the voting on the common agricultural policy was extremely serious and without precedent. It is noteworthy that those of us who entered the Community after the 1966 agreement on the Luxembourg compromise refrained from voting because we felt that there had been a breach of faith of the terms on which we entered the Community.

Mr. Viggers

During her testing day, will my right hon. Friend draw strength from the fact that those most directly concerned in the Falkland Islands crisis—the men of the Armed Forces and their families—fully understand the issues and the risks involved and are resolute in their will to perform the roles expected of them?

The Prime Minister

We are very fortunate in the men and women who make up the Armed Forces. They are resolute and courageous. We are very proud of them.

Q4. Mr. Dubs

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 20 May.
[column 471]

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dubs

Is the Prime Minister aware of recent assurances by Treasury Ministers that the large sums of money that are being spent on the task force are in no way having an adverse effect on Government economic policy? When the military action in the South Atlantic is over, therefore, will those same sums of money continue to be spent but on the needs of the homeless, the poor and the unemployed?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman has failed to observe one factor. If money from the Contingency Reserve is spent once, it cannot be spent twice.
[column 472]

Mr. John Carlisle

Will my right hon. Friend confirm the assurance that was given to the House by the Minister with responsibility for sport that the Government will put no pressure on the British football authorities to withdraw from the World Cup? Does she agree that it would be more worth while if, in the event of our being drawn against Argentina, we were to withdraw on the morning of the game, thus putting pressure on FIFA to expel Argentina?

The Prime Minister

My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for sport replied to a question on that matter yesterday. It is not our present intention to intervene in the matters of the World Cup or the taking part in the World Cup of teams from Britain.