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LORD PRESIDENT'S LOBBYNORTHERN IRELAND BILL

The Lord President said the Bill was progressing slowly but ^{he} had not yet considered the guillotine. The pace now indicates that it was more likely that the Government would next week be considering a number of options either-to continue with the Bill and increase the number of days, keep to the timetable motion and though it wasn't a serious option, drop the Bill. If he had to make a bet, he would bet, without giving the odds, that it would receive Royal Assent and stressed that the Government's commitment is to continue and that they were not at this stage seriously considering dropping it.

He agreed that there appeared to be some very skilled operators attempting to delay the Bill, and repeated that the Govt was most unlikely to drop the Bill. Though the Finance Bill should not be compared with the NI Bill - equally the Government would not consider dropping that Bill.

MIDDLE-EAST

The Lord President rejected the suggestion that there was a lack of Government commitment on the Middle-East. He accepted that there was a requirement that there should be a debate. He has a strong desire for a debate but would not forecast the timing of one. He sensed a strong genuine feeling for one, with interest in the Middle-East greatly increased in the last 3 years, he said there was no slippage in next week's timetable with the Government committed to the long term opposition request on the Industry Training Board order, and the Government's wish to debate the European Community Document on proposals on European Union when a resolution was expected on the Luxembourg Agreement.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The Lord President would not comment on the Cabinet's reactions to current pay disputes. He said with regard to the national health service they should be guided by today's debate and on the British Rail situation he said the Government would continue to stay at arm's length. He was not able to assess BR's future plans, and reminded them that with regard to the workshops the situation had moved into a new phase, and said that BR's position would not be enhanced if the Government were seen to be involved and hence felt it was wise not to do so.

FALKLANDS

He could not say why the MoD had changed their mind over giving details of casualties, nor assess the effect on the Task Force of the casualties. He was however conscious of the need to reach a balance between the media and the MoD but pointed out that MoD had to have regard to the feeling of the next of kin, the operational details, and the requirements of the media.

Questioned about Mr Nott's reference to the Red Cross assistance for Port Stanley inhabitants, he was not able to give details.

The Lord President would not comment on the suggestion that the US did not seem to be keen on the UK's idea for independence and that the US seemed to be putting conditions on the US involvement.

As a former Trade Minister he said his advise had not been sought over how to treat Japan after their vote at the UN last week, but emphasised that what was more important was that the Task Force had not been impeded by the vote.

LOBBY BRIEFING

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L PRESIDENT'S LOBBY

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He thought his speech on Monday referring to costs of the Falklands operation was well reported but pointed out that he had had no actual figures and had made the general point which the Chief Secretary had made previously.

If there was a need for a statement before the Recess, he said the Report Stage of the Finance Bill was the most likely vehicle though at this stage he obviously had no idea of the nature of the costs.

He confirmed that the Defence Paper would be published before the Recess with an addendum.

SW