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**Se refiere a:**

**13MAY82 – HoC. Interpelación a Margaret Thatcher en la House of Commons.**

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## Margaret Thatcher House of Commons PQs

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### ENGAGEMENTS

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#### **Q1. Mr. Barry Jones**

asked the Prime Minister what are her official engagements for 13 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. Jones**

Notwithstanding the grave situation in the South Atlantic, will the right hon. Lady concede that throughout the 1980s Britain's major problem will be unemployment? Will the right hon. Lady instruct the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make available immediately a £1 billion boost for industrial regeneration and job creation?

#### **The Prime Minister**

I accept that at home tackling both inflation and unemployment will remain one of the major problems of the decade. It will also be a major problem in Europe and probably in other countries as well. [column 942]I do not believe that making available an extra £1 billion, which would have to come from the taxpayer, would have the effect that the hon. Gentleman desires.

#### **Mr. Gorst**

Will my right hon. Friend give a categorical assurance that the objectives with which the task force left for the South Atlantic are exactly the same today as when it left?

#### **The Prime Minister**

Yes, Sir. I have seen various reports in the press. May I make it perfectly clear that we are working for a peaceful solution, not a peaceful sell-out?

#### **Mr. Grimond**

Will the Prime Minister look again at the discrepancy that is developing between the pay offered to judges and senior civil servants and that offered to nurses? Is she aware that in spite of what she said yesterday, taking into account indexed pensions, the gap is too big and will undermine any public confidence in the right hon. Lady's calls for wage restraint?

#### **The Prime Minister**

I understand that a number of questions on that subject were asked of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench today. The right hon. Gentleman will know that those who are in charge of top management in the Civil Service and the Armed Forces and those who are judges have not had full increases for a number of years. Indeed, no Top Salaries Review Body award has been implemented in full and on time since 1974. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I took the view that this country must be able to secure the best judges and the best generals and admirals. We must ensure that they are properly paid and that our top civil servants, including the foremost managerial level, which is that of Under-Secretary, are reasonably well paid. If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the comparisons with 1980 he will find that in the TSRB groups the new rates, including the new offer, are 8 per cent. over the 1980 recommended levels, while the rates for the nurses on the same rules are 12.8 per cent. over 1980.

#### **Sir John Eden**

Looking to the Falklands, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reassert that, for the British Government, there are two absolute sticking points? The first is that there must be cast-iron assurances that the Argentines will withdraw all their military and civil personnel, pending which the task force will remain on station. The second is that the aggressor shall not benefit from his aggression, so that there can be no commitment, expressed or implied, either now or for the future, regarding Argentine's claims to sovereignty over British territory.

#### **The Prime Minister**

In answer to my right hon. Friend's two points, as I understood them, all Argentine military and civil personnel must be withdrawn from the Falkland Islands on a special time schedule, and that must be verified. Under the arrangements that have continually been discussed—the proposals changed a little—our task force would not be withdrawn until the Argentines had withdrawn. With regard to sovereignty, we must insist absolutely that the Argentines do not enter into any settlement at the outset on the understanding that they have sovereignty at the end. We must have an undertaking from them that sovereignty is not committed, but is negotiable.

**Mr. Foot**

I thank the Prime Minister for using her influence to ensure that we shall have a debate on these matters today. Perhaps a full debate is a better way of [column 943]exploring the present position than questions and answers now. I put to the right hon. Lady that in view of the importance of the matter—I am sure that she will confirm to some of her right hon. and hon. Friends that the Government said that they were prepared to accept the Peruvian terms—she will surely be ready to agree to the proposal that I made earlier this week, that if there is a settlement, and we all hope that there will be, the terms will have to put to the House. That is obviously right.

However, if there is a non-settlement—if no agreement is reached in the next few days—will the right hon. Lady undertake to look afresh at the proposition that the House should have the chance to examine the position—[Hon. Members: “No.” ]—before there is any further escalation of the military conflict?

**Mr. Stokes**

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for interrupting, but is not that tedious—

**Mr. Speaker**

Order. We had better continue with questions.

**The Prime Minister**

In some ways it is easier if one answers precisely detailed questions, which are of tremendous importance, during the course of a debate. One tries to answer the right hon. Gentleman's questions and those of other hon. Members. With regard to the Peruvian terms, the terms proposed by this country through Mr. Haig have not been fully published. The right hon. Gentleman should not take those that have been published in Lima as necessarily an accurate account of those that were put forward by this country through Mr. Haig. A description of our terms was given by Francis Pym the Foreign Secretary in the House last week. That description is, of course, the accurate one.

With regard to a settlement, yes, we do work for a peaceful settlement, but the right hon. Gentleman must accept that it may not be possible, for reasons already stated by my hon. Friends, for us to come to a settlement that is acceptable to us and to the Argentines. We shall try to do so, but, as hon. Members say, there are certain things that we cannot and must not forgo. That must be well understood.

If there is a settlement, the Government would come afterwards to report to the House and would be answerable for the settlement that they had agreed. Equally, if there is not a settlement, the power of action resides in the Government. I make it clear that no military option or action has been stopped by virtue of the negotiations up to date.

**Mr. Flannery**

They should be.

**The Prime Minister**

No, they should not be—never. That would be too easy a ploy on the part of the Argentines. If there is not a settlement the Government inherently have the power to act, and we are answerable to the House for our actions.

**Mr. Foot**

I understand about answerability to the House, but the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement on Sunday in which he elaborated on another option open to the Government—a continued blockade, which, he said, was perfectly possible. I say that the House as a whole should have the chance of passing judgment on that position. We want the House as a whole to dictate the situation, not 60 or 70 of the right hon. Lady's backwoodsmen off the leash.

[column 944]

**The Prime Minister**

We really cannot have a full debate on military options with the House making a decision. Nothing would be more helpful to the enemy or more damaging to our boys.

**Q2. Mr. Arthur Davidson**

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 May.

**The Prime Minister**

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

**Mr. Davidson**

Among the things that we should not forgo is the right to freedom of expression. If the Prime Minister really believes—[Hon. Members: “Reading” ] Yes, I am reading.

**Mr. Speaker**

Order. I thought that by now every hon. Member knew that hon. Members never admit to reading a question.

**Mr. Davidson**

I was reading the Prime Minister's ringing declaration on the BBC to the effect that——

**Mr. Speaker**

Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman must remember it.

**Mr. Davidson**

I do not seem to be doing very well. The Prime Minister was at pains to point out on the BBC that we are a democracy. If she really believes that, will she call off the dangerous vendetta against the BBC, because one of the tenets of democracy, law and liberty is the right of people to express their views publicly, even if they happen to disagree with those in authority.

**The Prime Minister**

The BBC does not lack freedom of expression, I do not lack freedom of expression, the House does not lack freedom of expression and the people do not lack freedom of expression. I believe in all four.

**Q3. Mr. Adley**

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 May.

**The Prime Minister**

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

**Mr. Adley**

Reverting to the point made by the Leader of the Opposition, will my right hon. Friend accept that most people in the country, and most of her right hon. and hon. Friends, expect the Government to behave like a Government and not as though they are running a debating society? We expect them to make decisions and to come before the House and defend any decisions that they take.

**The Prime Minister**

My hon. Friend is right. The Government have an inherent power to act and they must use that power and report to the House.

**Mr. George Cunningham**

In view of the requests made to us by the Governments of Sweden and France about one of the prisoners taken by us on South Georgia, does the Prime Minister understand that the time is overdue for a formal statement to be made by the British Government about their view of the applicability of the laws of war to the present conflict? I regret to say that it looks, on the face of it, as if both parties have breached at least one of the conditions in the laws of war that we have signed.

**The Prime Minister**

I think that the hon. Gentleman was referring to Commander Astiz, who was the commander of the Argentine garrison in Grytviken. Since we retook South Georgia both the French and Swedish [column 945] Governments have requested an opportunity to question him in relation to crimes against nationals of those countries that allegedly took place in Argentina. For the moment, Commander Astiz has been held on Ascension Island. We shall, of course, comply with the Geneva convention.

**Mr. Skinner**

He is one of the right hon. Lady's pals.

**Mr. Goodhew**

Will my right hon. remind the Leader of the Opposition, and those who think as he does, of the 30 million lives that were lost in the last World War in Europe alone because the democracies refused to accept, recognise and resist the aggressive intentions of one dictatorship? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that such a thing does not happen again?

**The Prime Minister**

I accept that the effects of Argentine aggression would go far beyond the effect on the [column 946] Falklands if it were allowed to continue without us stopping it, reversing it and ensuring that the Argentine forces withdraw from the islands. That is generally realised throughout the House.

**Mr. Hooley**

Is it the Government's objective to return to the status quo in the Falkland Islands?

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton**

I hope so.

**The Prime Minister**

Our objective would be to allow the people of the Falkland Islands their own wishes, to live their own way of life under the Government of their choice.

**Mr. Skinner**

Paramountcy?

**The Prime Minister**

That is known as self-determination and it is in the United Nations charter.