

LORD PRESIDENT

HANDLING OF THE COMARE REPORT

If it is accepted that the report should be published before the Recess - and I think that is right since to publish afterwards is likely to maximise publicity - there is much to be said for publication, as planned on Tuesday, July 22 or alternatively July 23. On balance I would go for July 22.

If there is no Oral Statement it is all the more important that there should be a fuller Written Answer. The present Written Answer as drafted is entirely inadequate for the Government's purpose.

I believe that between the second and third sentences there should be a summary of the conclusions of the report on these lines:

"The report shows there were substantial releases of radioactivity from Sellafield in the early 1950s of which the Black Inquiry on the possible increased incidence of cancer in West Cumbria was not aware. But it notes that the increased doses during the 30 year period between 1950-80 are still well below the doses that are estimated to have been received during this period by the population from natural background and from nuclear weapons testing fall-out combined. These increased doses are still well below those that would readily explain the observed cases of leukaemia in Seascale. Thus, the report says, the substance and essential conclusions of the Black Advisory Group remain unchanged. The report adds that it is likely it will never be possible to establish with certainty whether there is any relationship between the leukaemia cases at Seascale and radioactive discharges from the Sellafield site."

In my view it is extremely important to put this summary on the record in the Written Answer and to use that summary in a Press Notice. Otherwise, without this steer, the media will almost certainly put a negative gloss on what is a reassuring report.

In addition, I think the last sentence of the current draft Answer should say: "The Government is giving urgent consideration to the report, and in particular the implications for monitoring radiation. Any necessary action will be taken."

To Summarise

I recommend:

- publication July 22, with CFRs issued early (9am) that day (and not the day before);
- a Written Answer which summarises the report on the lines set out above and which provides the basis for a press notice; both this form of Written Answer and Press Notice are necessary.

BERNARD INGHAM  
17 July 1986