



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

9 March 1982

Dear Mr. Owen.

Yesterday afternoon, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and I met the Leader of the Opposition to discuss President Reagan's visit to this country in June.

Planning for this visit, which is still three months away, is at a very early stage. All that has been firmly agreed with the United States authorities so far is that President Reagan should come here on 7-9 June as the guest of Her Majesty The Queen. Discussions are still going on with President Reagan's staff about the outline programme for the visit, and we do not expect these to be concluded for some little time.

As part of these preliminary consultations the British Government has suggested that President Reagan might be invited to address members of both Houses of Parliament during the course of his visit. No United States President has come to this country as the guest of the Sovereign since President Wilson in 1919 and none has addressed Members of Parliament in this way since the war. On the other hand, leaders of all our major European allies have given such addresses during the same period; and so did Mr. Kosygin in 1967. It therefore seemed very natural to think of offering President Reagan, as the leader of one of this country's closest allies and friends, the opportunity of making a major speech before members of both our Houses of Parliament. It also seemed fitting that such an address should be given in Westminster Hall.

/The Government

The Government thought it right, as a first step, to establish informally whether such a suggestion would be welcome to President Reagan. If the President responded favourably, it was the Government's intention then to consult Michael Foot, David Steel, you and the authorities of both Houses, with a view to arranging for the President to be formally invited to address members of both Houses. I am afraid that before we could reach that point, information about the discussions on the outline programme for the visit reached the Press in Washington. I am sorry that this has happened and I should like to assure you and the authorities of both Houses that the Government intended no discourtesy whatever. On the contrary, I should like to repeat that it was our intention to hold the fullest consultations at the appropriate moment.

Now that the suggestion that President Reagan should be invited to address members of both Houses of Parliament has become public, I should be grateful if consultations could begin through the usual channels as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Whelan

The Right Honourable David Owen, M.P.