

SUBJECT



cc Minister Jira 20

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

8 March, 1982.

Dear Brian,

Visit by President Reagan

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary saw Mr. Michael Foot this afternoon about the suggestion that President Reagan should be invited to address Members of both Houses of Parliament during his visit to this country in June.

The Prime Minister explained to Mr. Foot that the President's visit would be the first by an American President as the guest of the Sovereign since President Woodrow Wilson in 1919. Moreover, no American President had addressed both Houses of Parliament since the Second World War. On the other hand, President de Gaulle had addressed both Houses in 1960, and so, amongst others, had Mr. Kosygin, President Saragat, Chancellor Brandt, and President Giscard. The Government believed that it would have been unthinkable for President Reagan, as the leader of our most powerful ally and friend, to have come to this country as the guest of The Queen and not to have been given the opportunity to address both Houses.

We were still at a very early stage in planning the President's visit, and we were discussing an outline programme with his staff. It had been our intention, when that outline programme had been settled with the Americans and the President had indicated that he would welcome an invitation to address both Houses of Parliament, to consult Mr. Foot, as Leader of the Opposition, and the Authorities of both Houses of Parliament. The Government had also thought it appropriate for the President to give his address in Westminster Hall. It was true that other leaders had spoken in the Royal Gallery, but President de Gaulle had given his address in Westminster Hall.

The leak which had occurred over the weekend in Washington had been most unfortunate. She would not normally have expected to consult him at this point when the visit was still 3 months away, but now that news of the suggestion that the President should address both Houses had leaked, she would be grateful for his views. The Foreign Secretary added that he believed that there would be very considerable advantage if President Reagan could make a major speech in London about US/European relations. There was a good deal of misunderstanding between the Americans and the Europeans at the moment, and President Reagan could make a speech which would do a great deal

to strengthen the cohesion of the alliance. Mr. Foot said that he believed that the Opposition and the House Authorities should have been consulted before any proposal, however tentative, had been put to the Americans. If he had been asked, he would have been bound to say that President Reagan was in many ways a controversial figure, both in his own country, and in the world at large. He was pursuing policies at home and abroad which many people, not just those in the Labour Party, thought controversial. Moreover, he had not yet been in office very long. Nothing that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had said made him take a different view. In any case, he did not believe that the President should give an address in Westminster Hall. This was a privilege which had been accorded only to President de Gaulle since the War, and he was a figure of altogether different stature from President Reagan. If President Reagan was to address both Houses of Parliament, he should do so in the Royal Gallery, as all other foreign leaders, except President de Gaulle, had done in recent times. He was sorry if he was taking a line that was embarrassing the Government, but had they consulted him and the Parliamentary Authorities at the right moment, they could have avoided the difficulties they were now in.

The Prime Minister pointed out repeatedly that there would have been no point in approaching Mr. Foot and the House Authorities until they knew whether the idea of addressing both Houses commended itself to President Reagan. We were still at the stage of trying to establish a preliminary programme, and it was only when that had been done that it made sense to consult more widely. We were not handling this visit in a different way from any other. It would be inconceivable to have President Reagan in this country, and not to give him the opportunity to address both Houses of Parliament.

After further discussion, the Prime Minister invited Mr. Foot to consider further what she and the Foreign Secretary had said, and to consult the Shadow Cabinet, as he had indicated he would wish to do. She would send him a letter setting out what she and the Foreign Secretary had said in discussion.

I now attach a draft letter which the Prime Minister would like to send to Mr. Foot early tomorrow morning. I should be grateful for comments on it by 0945 tomorrow, Tuesday.

I am sending copies of this letter and of the draft to Michael Collon (Office of the Lord Chancellor), David Heyhoe (Office of the Lord President), Michael Pownall (Office of the Leader of the House of Lords), and Murdo Maclean (Chief Whips Office).

Yours ever,

Shirley Williams.

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

DRAFT LETTER TO THE RT. HON. MICHAEL FOOT, M.P.

I am grateful to you for coming to see me and Peter Carrington yesterday afternoon about President Reagan's visit to this country in June.

As I explained to you then, 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 both Houses of Parliament since the war. On the other hand, leaders of all our major European allies have given addresses before both Houses 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 to the Government fitting that he should give the address 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 you, as Leader of the Opposition, 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 you could let me have your views on it as soon as is convenient.