

PRIME MINISTER

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Willie Rickett has given you a brief run-down of today's two statements.

You saw the text of Mr. Luce's statement in Brussels, but you may like to know a little more about the exchanges in the House on that one.

Denis Healey endorsed the Daily Telegraph's "foolish and spineless" comment. He suggested that we were in for problems over the future of the Atlantic Treaty. Diplomacy was unlikely to succeed in situations where there were no disincentives to unilateral action. He suggested that Mr. Luce may have preferred to say nothing about other measures because he had nothing to say. Whilst the Government was busy arguing in other fields that we should negotiate from a position of strength, in the Falklands we started from a position of weakness.

Mr. Luce got a little help from Sir Anthony Kershaw, John Biggs-Davison and, as you have heard, Jim Callaghan. But hardly anybody else seemed to be trying to be helpful. Enoch Powell asked whether the Government took the view that public opinion would support the use of force to maintain British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and their dependants. Bernard Braine saw it as a comic opera. We asserted our sovereignty whilst forcing the islanders into growing dependence on Argentina. Nigel Fisher challenged references to defending the Islands "to the best of our ability" since we had no ability.

Freddie Burden, Pat Duffy, and Keith Speed amongst others, argued the value of a greater surface Navy, while Richard Alexander simply asked that the marines should round up and remove the twelve interlopers.

Concluding, Denis Healey said that the Government clearly took the Argentinian moves as deliberate provocation. Taking a cue from Mr. Callaghan, he argued that the Government, unlike its predecessor, had failed to assemble a suitable naval force to assist in sorting matters out. It was simply one more in a terrible series of errors on defence policy.

30 March 1982

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