

PRESS LINE

Lead across to
Janice at 1430
23/11

SOVIET UNION AND INF TALKS

It is a matter of profound regret that the Soviet Union has discontinued with no date for resumption the Geneva INF talks.

The first priority for the NATO Alliance since 1979 has been to seek a balanced and verifiable agreement to limit and if possible eliminate the deployment of ^{intermediate range nuclear} these missiles.

The West has proposed a number of ideas to achieve this and we have done all in our power to continue with these crucial negotiations. *my last week for US. put forward a new w construction proposal which remains on the table.*

During this period since we first gave the Soviet Union formal notice of our concern about ^{the} SS20 they have almost tripled the number of these missiles deployed.

Since 1981 when the first negotiations began, they have increased the numbers deployed by over 100 which is an increase of more than 40% over their 1981 position.

Throughout this build-up of Soviet SS20s, the West has remained at the Conference table. We have made it clear that we wish the negotiations to continue. This remains our firm position. Our first priority is a negotiated agreement.

Today not a single weapon of this sort is operationally deployed

in Europe on the Western side. The Soviet Union has 243 SS20s targetted on Western Europe.

There could be no justification therefore for a breakdown in the negotiations and we sincerely hope that these will be resumed as early as possible in the New Year.

Four years ago we made it clear to the Soviet Union that whilst our first priority was to conclude a satisfactory agreement, in the absence of such an agreement we would have to go ahead with the modernisation of our own intermediate range weapons systems by the end of 1983.

Final preparations for deployment have begun. In the interests of Alliance security, we will not be deflected from our intention to achieve operational deployment by the end of this year.

But it is important to stress that we remain prepared to halt or reverse any deployment that takes place if we are able to achieve an acceptable agreement with the Soviet Union; and we will spare no efforts to achieve this.

We must hope that an early Soviet return to the negotiating table will make this possible.

Graphical Association, regrets that anyone should have been injured in the dispute but recognises that this morning the TUC came out in support of the NGA on the core of the issue—the victimisation of six former members of Mr. Shah's staff whom he has refused to reinstate? Is he further aware that it would be greatly appreciated by the trade union movement if he ensured that his officials acted as constructively as possible to secure conciliation because the only issue now at stake is that of the six members, and the union is looking to the right hon. Gentleman for support on that issue?

Mr. King: As I said in my statement, ACAS, which is independent, is seeking to achieve a settlement of the dispute. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will lend his good offices to ensuring that the NGA, in wishing to prosecute an industrial dispute—which it is entitled under the law of the land to do—will ensure that it conducts it within the law.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A few days ago you were asked, as the result of a newspaper article, about the SDP and Liberals in particular not getting a fair crack of the whip in relation to speaking opportunities in the House. It may be remarkable to people outside Parliament—though it is not to most hon. Members—that when we get into the sharp end of politics, as we have just been doing—with the Tories supporting the bosses and the Labour party supporting the workers—SDP and Liberal hon. Members are not to be found.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Intermediate Nuclear Force Talks

3.58 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the INF negotiations.

As hon. Members may be aware, the Soviet delegate to the Geneva INF talks has made it clear this morning that the Soviet Union does not intend to continue the present round and has given no date for the resumption of the talks.

The Government regret this Soviet decision and can see no justification for it. As recently as 15 November the United States tabled a further constructive proposal in the negotiations, which was rejected out of hand by the Soviet Union. The Russians may seek to justify their interruption of the talks by the final preparations for initial Western INF deployment. But the House will recall that the West has remained at the conference table while the Soviet Union has increased its own deployments of SS20s by over 40 per cent.

The NATO Alliance has made its first priority the achievement of a balanced and verifiable agreement to reduce and if possible to eliminate these weapons worldwide. At the same time, we have made it clear that until such an agreement can be attained the Alliance will proceed in accordance with its decision in 1979 to work towards a balance which would safeguard Western security. We will not be deflected from achieving the first stage of this objective by the end of this year.

I wish to emphasise that the Alliance remains ready to halt or reverse at any time the deployment of the missiles if only we can secure an agreement with the Soviet Union that would allow us to do so. The achievement of such an agreement remains our unshakeable objective. The Alliance will spare no effort to secure it. We remain convinced that an agreement is possible and that it remains in the interests of East and West that the negotiations should resume at the earliest possible date. We therefore urge the Soviet Union to demonstrate an equally sincere commitment to arms control by returning to the negotiating table.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): Is the Minister aware that he has made a serious and disturbing statement, although the news was not unexpected? Does he recall that Her Majesty's Government have been arguing for four years that the moment the West began to deploy cruise and Pershing missiles agreement would be reached at the disarmament talks? Is it not clear that that could not have been more wrong? As the Soviet Union has frequently warned, it has produced a breakdown in the talks.

The Minister suggested that the responsibility for the breakdown lay exclusively with the Soviet Government. Is he aware that Her Majesty's Government's refusal to allow their Polaris force to be included in the balance has been a major obstacle to the talks until last week?

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Whose side is the right hon. Gentleman on?

Mr. Healey: I am on the side of peace and disarmament. Is the Minister aware that, only last week, the Soviet Government, at the last moment, offered not to include British and French nuclear forces in the balance and to reduce the number of their SS20s to half those

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deployed in 1979 and their warheads to well under half those deployed in 1979? How can the hon. Gentleman justify the action of Western governments in rejecting that offer out of hand and leaking the proposal? This is a repetition of their action over a similar proposal after the so-called "walk in the woods" a few months ago. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that this treatment of the serious proposals by the Soviet Government is consistent with the sincere negotiations on disarmament to which Western Governments committed themselves in December 1979?

Is the Minister aware that the decision to deploy cruise and Pershing missiles is opposed by a substantial majority of people in Britain and Germany—the two countries which are so far involved—and has done more damage to public support for the NATO Alliance than any other action during the past 34 years? Will the Government now insist that the United States Government should offer not to deploy any more missiles if the Soviet Union will agree to resume the talks? Will they also insist that the West should seek to take the latest Soviet offer as a starting point in renewed negotiations which, even at this late moment, might save us from an acceleration and escalation of a nuclear arms race which can only decrease the security of the British people and present a greater threat to the prospects for peace in the world?

Mr. Luce: The House will agree with the last remarks of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) that it is our desire to see an end to an escalation of the arms race. I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman lays the responsibility for this latest development on the Western world and ignores essential facts. Since 1979 there has been a trebling of the number of SS20s. Since 1981 the numbers have increased by 40 per cent., and they are increasing at an average of one a week. The right hon. Gentleman seeks to ignore those salient facts that threaten our national security.

With his wealth of experience as Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Gentleman surely would agree that the prime duty of the Secretary of State for Defence and Her Majesty's Government is the security of the nation. That should be our first and ultimate objective.

I am surprised also at the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the United Kingdom and French strategic nuclear force. He knows that we are not talking about mixing like with like. The main point to come out of the discussions in public and at the INF level is that, whatever the Soviet Union's proposals, it wishes to retain a monopoly of intermediate range nuclear weapons. We believe that that poses a threat to our security, and we must consider that. Our genuine aim is to reach an agreement in Geneva, and we do not believe that we can do that by moving away from the negotiating table.

Mr. Healey: Is the Minister aware that the Soviet Government have had a monopoly of intermediate range missiles in Europe for over 20 years and that this was accepted by all previous British Governments—of both parties—since it was offset by the allocation of 400 Poseidon warheads to SACEUR? Is he aware also that the Soviet Government have offered to reduce the number of warheads deployed to half those that were deployed in 1979? Why did he not persuade the Americans to accept that offer as a basis for agreement? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Labour party regard the deployment of what

has been described by the American negotiator, Mr. Perl, as a weapon of no obvious military utility—the cruise missile—is a means to increase Britain's insecurity rather than contribute to its support?

Mr. Luce: Against the background of the twin-track decision, the principle of which was supported by the Labour Government, I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Soviet Union should continue—whatever proposals it has put forward so far—with an overwhelming superiority and monopoly of those weapons? Does he believe that that is in the interests of Western security? I must ask the right hon. Gentleman that question, because it is a serious consideration in our national interests. The United States, with the full support of the NATO Alliance, has put forward proposals which, in broad terms, suggest a balance. We stand ready at any time to halt or reverse the deployment if the Soviet Union responds to our proposals.

Mr. Healey rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It might be fairer to the House if the right hon. Gentleman were to speak again at the end of questions.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Does my hon. Friend agree that, far from being scared by the Soviet walkout during the talks, most Europeans, especially in Britain and in Germany, will sleep more safely and securely in their beds now they know that the Soviet monopoly of these weapons is ending and some equilibrium is slowly on the way to being achieved?

Mr. Luce: It is essential that the Soviet Union—let alone our public—should understand that the resolution of the British and other Western Governments is to ensure the safety of our people. That is a prime objective. Allied to that, we have a genuine and earnest desire to seek an agreement that leads to a broad balance in weapons. We believe that that would be in the interests of all concerned. If the Soviet Union were ready to respond to those flexible proposals, we might make some progress.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale): Does the Minister agree that the Soviet decision prematurely to end the talks should be universally deplored? Does he accept, however, that after four years the talks cannot be regarded as a great success, since they were billed as arms reduction talks but we have ended up with the deployment of cruise and Pershing in the West and a new generation of missiles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia? In the light of that, what is the Government's response to Prime Minister Trudeau's suggestion of a summit meeting of the five nuclear powers?

Mr. Luce: On the first point, I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the Soviet decision this morning is to be deplored. The Secretary-General of NATO, Dr. Luns, made exactly the same comments this morning in response to that decision. The Government remain ready to work as closely as possible with our allies, as we have done for a long time, to try to persuade the Soviet Union that it is in its own interests as well as ours that we should reach an agreement on balanced and verifiable arms reductions. That is our aim and any proposals, including those from Mr. Trudeau, must be seriously considered.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Have the Government received an assurance that the United States

is ready to resume negotiations at the earliest possible moment and has not been discouraged by the somewhat childish tactics of Moscow?

Mr. Luce: President Reagan has already made it plain, not only that he joins us in regretting the Soviet decision this morning, but that the United States, with the full support of the rest of us, stands ready at any moment to resume discussions, and the sooner the better.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Is the Minister aware that the central aim of all of us must be to restore the negotiations? In the meantime, is he aware that for very similar reasons, and with some of the same hesitations as Helmut Schmidt, I believe that NATO has no alternative but to continue with the first stage of the deployment? Will NATO Foreign Ministers now meet and consider seriously the possibility of declaring a freeze on first stage deployment of the 41 missiles when they become operational to allow time for the Soviet Union to reconsider its position and return to the negotiations, and will NATO maintain that freeze so long as there is any chance that the Soviet Union will negotiate a substantial reduction in the SS20s?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's first remarks. We now have no alternative but to proceed with deployment, but he is absolutely right to suggest that we should be ready at any moment to respond to any possibility of halting or reversing that if there is genuine progress in discussions. The sooner the discussions are resumed, the better.

As for consultation with other Foreign Ministers, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is shortly to be a discussion at NATO level. All these matters can be assessed at that stage in the light of this morning's events. I am sure that there will be a renewed strong commitment to do whatever we can to try to get discussions going again.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): While we must all agree that the breakdown of the talks is most unfortunate and distressing, does my hon. Friend agree that responsibility for the Russian walk-out must be shared by all those people, including many Opposition Members, who have encouraged the so-called peace movements, which have increased the likelihood of a tactical walk-out of that kind?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right in the sense that, however sincere the people who have joined in the protest movements and however much we all share the desire for a lowering of tension, the Soviet Union has tried to use the protest movements to undermine the elected Governments of the Western world and the unity of the Western Alliance. Although the people concerned are extremely sincere in their intentions, the Soviet Union has tried to use them as a tactical ploy to its own advantage.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Is the Minister aware that many people in the West who have no illusions about the Soviet system cannot understand why the British and French nuclear capability is not included on the side of the West? Does he agree that in a two-sided confrontation no one would imagine that capability being used in support of the Warsaw Pact and that that cannot be overlooked in negotiations?

As the CIA has announced that the Americans overestimated Russian missile deployment by 100 per

cent., what is the basis for suggesting that the Soviet Union has an overwhelming lead over the nuclear forces of the West?

Mr. Luce: I should first correct a point that I made to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). My reference to discussions at NATO level related to a meeting of Defence Ministers, not Foreign Ministers.

In answer to the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart), we have discussed many times, including the recent debate on the twin-track policy, the position of the United Kingdom and French strategic deterrents. We have made it absolutely clear that we are talking about strategic weapons and not intermediate weapons, so we are not comparing like with like. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has made it plain both at home and at the United Nations that if START makes progress and there is no strengthening of Soviet defences we could review our position and consider whether the United Kingdom and French strategic deterrents should be included in the discussions. At present, however, we are dealing with intermediate and not strategic weapons.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Does the Minister agree that the timing of the introduction of Cruise and Pershing in Europe was a negotiating ploy to get the Russians to take the SS20s away from Eastern Europe? That ploy having failed, does he agree that there will now be more SS20s and other Russian nuclear missiles? Having failed to call the bluff of the Russian bear, will the Government now call President Reagan's bluff and return the cruise missiles already here to the United States?

Mr. Luce: We shall do no such thing in the absence of any agreement with the Soviet Union. I am surprised at some of the Opposition comments, which seem to ignore the facts of the case. They describe what the western world, led by the United States, has been doing in the negotiations as a ploy, but it is clear from President Reagan's published proposals that there has been any amount of flexibility—zero option proposals or, in the absence of that ideal solution, an interim agreement at a lower level, and the latest proposal for a global figure of 420 warheads. So far, however, the Soviet Union has made it plain that it wishes to maintain a monopoly. That is the key point. It is the overall balance that we must aim for because that is how we believe that we can best achieve security.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Is it not disturbing that, thus far, the Soviet Union has shown itself unwilling to enter into any agreement between East and West based on equality in numbers of warheads of this kind? Is it not appalling that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) on behalf of the Labour party should put forward the case for a Soviet monopoly in these weapons? Bearing in mind that in the past four years the Soviet Union has added 200 SS20s with 600 warheads while we have remained at the negotiating table, what earthly justification is there for the Soviet Union to leave the talks when the first score of Cruise and Pershing missiles arrive in Europe?

Mr. Luce: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I go further. I hope that the situation is never reached, but even if we deploy the 572 Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles over a five-year period there would

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still be a Soviet monopoly, for which we would allow, in terms of the SS20s. There are more than 700 Ss20 warheads now targeted on Western Europe.

In addition, the NATO Alliance has shown a genuine desire to make progress and to reduce tensions by the recent announcement that we shall reduce our arms by a further 2,000 shorter-range nuclear weapons in Western Europe. That is further evidence of the Western world's genuine desire to make progress in the negotiations. If the Soviet Union would only respond, there would at least be some hope.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Is not one of the most disturbing aspects of the Soviet withdrawal from the talks the view expressed by leading United States commentators that the Soviet Union will continue to be removed from the negotiating table until after the American elections? The Minister says that he will spare no effort. Will he apply his mind to linking the strategic arms negotiations with the INF talks because the nature, range and delivery capability of the weapons blurs the two issues? Does he agree that we should therefore link the two and come to the negotiating table on all these issues before we blow one another up?

Mr. Luce: I remind the House, in answer to the hon. Gentleman, that the Soviet Union said this morning that it did not wish to continue the present round. Compared to previous rounds, this one has already gone on longer than any previous round. All that the Soviet Union has done is to say that it has not given a date for the resumption of talks on INF. I am not talking about START. The Soviet Union has given no indications on that matter. Obviously, we all hope that the talks will continue until they are due to adjourn, very shortly. All that I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that we can keep an open mind about the relationship between INF and START. At present they are divided between the two sets of talks, and we think that that is the best way to proceed.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I accept the implication in the Minister's statement that there is no reason for alarm or despondency, or for a change in Western policy over deployment. However, will the Minister accept that the West should not merely return to the nuclear counting-house, but seek actively to create the political atmosphere for the eventual success of the negotiations, and that Britain should be more prominent in the search to promote that atmosphere?

Mr. Luce: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that there should be no undue alarm. Indeed, the Soviet Union should understand the very genuine and strong desire of the Western world, including our Government, to achieve agreement as soon as possible, and to make progress in the Geneva discussions. Against that background, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, have said that we wish to have a dialogue with the Soviet Union. At least, we have to acknowledge that we live on the same planet, however much we may disagree with each other. We must find a way of living together. We shall certainly pursue that policy.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): Will the Minister state more clearly his answer to remarks by Conservative

Members about the peace movement helping to make the situation worse between East and West? Is the Minister saying that the peace movement, which includes ordinary people who want peace, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Free Churches and the Quakers, has somehow connived to undermine the security of the Western world? Is the Minister saying that those people are naive, and do not understand all the problems that we are arguing about?

Mr. Luce: I do not believe that anybody is questioning the sincere desire of people in the protest movements for progress, and a reduction in arms. The point that I was making, in reply to an earlier question, is that the Soviet Union is and has been, taking advantage of the protest movements to try to challenge the authority of elected Governments in the Western world, and to undermine the cohesion of the Western Alliance. That is not in our interests.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that the walk-out proves that the Soviet Union's attachment to the INF talks lay in their hope, or belief, that they could reach an agreement with the West that left them with some supremacy in theatre nuclear weapons? If that is the case and, as the deployment of cruise and Pershing is going ahead in western Europe, is there any real purpose in holding the talks again in their present form, or is it not time for both sides to take a breather and consider the situation anew?

Mr. Luce: We have been talking for just over two years, since the first Geneva talks started. It is fairly evident that the objective of the Soviet Government was to try to achieve an agreement that enabled them to have a strong monopoly of nuclear weapons. However, now that they see our resolution in starting to fulfil the principles of the twin-track policy, we must all earnestly hope that they understand that we are determined to defend ourselves and have a credible deterrent. At the same time, we are most anxious to reach an agreement with them. Against that background it is in all our interests—the Soviet Union's as well as Great Britain—that they resume their position at the negotiating table.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is it not a fact that, by deploying cruise missiles on our territory, the Government in no way represent the wishes of the majority of the British people and that the same is true of the Government in Western Germany? Has not the belligerent posture of the President of the United States over many areas of the world made mankind more fearful than ever before of those dreadful weapons and brought into the struggle against those weapons many people who were not in that struggle before? Has not the Prime Minister met real criticism in the meetings that she has had with the Heads of Government in India today? Does not all that mean that we should use our immense prestige and influence to bring back the Russians to the conference table so that the future can be discussed rationally, whether it be peace for all or Armageddon?

Mr. Luce: The British electorate had a chance in June this year to express their views on the Government's defence policy. They overwhelmingly endorsed it. Moreover, the German Bundestag, by a substantial majority, gave the go-ahead to the policy of deployment unless there were a negotiated settlement, and in Italy

there was a majority of 132 in favour of that policy. It is evident that the United States is demonstrating its commitment to the defence of the free and democratic way of life in western Europe. The Soviet Union should be under no misunderstanding that the United States is committed to the defence of western Europe and the Western world. If the Soviet Union has no misunderstanding about that, there is a better chance in the longer term of getting stronger security and peace.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is it not both extraordinary and sad that no Labour Member, not even the former Secretary of State for Defence the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), has condemned Soviet withdrawal from the peace talks?

Mr. Luce: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is totally incomprehensible.

Mr. Ioan Evans (Cynon Valley): As we now have enough nuclear weapons on this planet to destroy it 10 times over, is it not a human tragedy that more resources will be devoted to building up a larger stock of nuclear weapons in the nuclear arms race? What positive initiatives will the Government take in view of the recent CIA report that the Russian build-up of arms had been greatly exaggerated? What positive response will the Government make if the Commonwealth should support the call by Premier Trudeau for a summit conference now not only of the United States and the Soviet Union, but of China, France and Britain, to get us out of this nuclear madness?

Mr. Luce: It is for the reason that the hon. Gentleman gave at the beginning of his question that we want a reduction in armaments. That makes it all the more regrettable that the Soviet Union took the decision that it did this morning. It is only by talking and negotiating in the conference chamber, not by declaratory measures or rhetoric, that we shall make any progress. That is why we regret and deplore the decision all the more. The NATO Alliance has undertaken a net reduction of 2,400 short range nuclear warheads. That, if anything, is a demonstration of our desire to make progress. That will lead to the lowest level of such warheads for 20 years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Russians are probably watching reactions in democratic countries to their tactical and, I hope, temporary withdrawal from the talks? Would it not be right for the Russians to realise that every major political party in this country disapproves of their withdrawal from the talks? Would it not help if every major party made it clear that it did not want the Russians to have a monopoly of those types of weapons? Would it not be a helpful gesture to make sure that the Metropolitan police were deployed in large numbers round the Russian embassy today just in case the CND so disapproves of what the Russians are doing that it holds a demonstration there?

Mr. Luce: I think that the best contribution that the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party could make to our security and the prospects for peace would be to stand up now and say that they believe we should stick together, that we believe in a balance of armaments, and that the best hope for the peace of the world is to fulfil the principle that successive Governments have accepted—a twin-track policy decision.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Is it not to be remarked that the hon. Gentleman speaks of it being necessary for us to be at the negotiating table when he is reporting upon a series of talks in which we have played no part and have no power to influence what is taking place at the negotiating table? Is it not time therefore for us to consider very seriously the propositions that have half been put forward that this serious decision by the Soviet Union to withdraw provides an opportunity for a pause, for reflection, and perhaps for a new forum in which these matters can be discussed?

Should not the British and French weapons be included in one set of negotiations or the other so that if they are brought together they can be put on the table and be counted? I do not say that we should destroy our own weapons. That is not my position; I have never said that. Is there not a rational ground for the Soviet Union to say that these weapons, whether they crawl, swim or fly, are directed against them and therefore should be counted in the total?

Is not this a moment when we should not seek to condemn Moscow? I told them when I was there Clem Attlee's old dictum when it was suggested that the Labour party should walk out of the Chamber—"Don't walk out, you have only got to walk back some time". Is not that the position in which the Soviet Union will find itself?

Is it not the case that we cannot accept a Soviet veto in principle on the deployment of American nuclear weapons in Europe? Once that fact is accepted by the Soviet Union, is it not possible, as I believe firmly that it is, to reach an agreement since the issues that divide us are getting narrower the whole time? Therefore, although this breakdown if serious, does it not provide us with a fresh opportunity for beginning negotiations not in public, not making public offers, but in private in order to reach an agreement?

Mr. Luce: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that discussions in private in order to get agreement is the only sensible way to proceed and, with all his experience, he is in the best position to reflect on that. I wish that other Opposition Members would reflect his view that it is unacceptable to have a Soviet veto over the United States and Western policies in this field.

Earlier the right hon. Gentleman suggested that we do not have influence over the discussions in Geneva. We do. The NATO Alliance is consulting very closely and we fully support the flexible proposals that President Reagan has put forward.

In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's point about the need for time to reflect, as I said earlier, very shortly the Defence Ministers in NATO will be meeting and no doubt that will be a sensible occasion on which to reflect on the present position. But no one must be in any doubt about our sense of resolution in the Western world with regard to the twin-track policy.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is it not abundantly clear from everything my hon. Friend has said this afternoon that Her Majesty's Government remain strongly committed to the cause of multilateral and genuine and balanced disarmament? However, is it not also important for the House to bear in mind that there is a danger of over-reacting to this Soviet walk-out that may have more to do with internal political difficulties in the

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Kremlin than with a long-term strategic decision to boycott the negotiations? Will the Government therefore keep up the pressure in the way my hon. Friend suggested?

Mr. Luce: On the question of multilateral and balanced disarmament, I reaffirm that we are utterly committed to seeking ways in which we can achieve viable multilateral and balanced disarmament and we feel that this is the only safe way to proceed in arms control policies. Indeed, the House will have noted that some time ago Mr. Andropov himself intimated that he believed that this was the best way to proceed when he said that one-sided or unilateral disarmament was in itself naive.

I agree with my hon. Friend entirely that it would be wrong to over-react. We continue to invite the Soviet Union to return to the negotiating table, pointing out all the time that we believe that it is as much in their interest as it is in ours that the discussions should resume as soon as possible.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): If the peace movement is helping the Soviet Union, how is it that the only party that is losing members faster than the British Communist party is the SDP?

Why has the Minister concentrated on only half the formula? He said that the talks had to lead to balanced and verifiable reductions. The big problem in the talks is that cruise missiles cannot be verified for a number of reasons. First, they are very small. Secondly, they are mobile. How can the Soviet Union count them their satellites — [Interruption.] An hon. Member refers to SS20s. They are launched from concrete pads —

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member should not allow himself to be distracted. He must ask his question.

Mr. Boyes: I agree and I apologise, Mr. Speaker. I should not be distracted by buffoons.

Is it not a fact that these weapons are mobile, and if there is a dozen here today and a dozen there tomorrow the Russians will not know whether it is the same dozen? Is it a fact that cruise missiles can be hidden away? Is not the fact being overlooked that not 400 or 500 but 5,000, 6,000, 7,000 or perhaps 10,000 cruise missiles are being produced —

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must bring his question to a close. He has had a very fair run. He may say his last words.

Mr. Boyes: My last word is that not just a question of 400 or 500 cruise missiles being produced but up to 10,000 can be hidden in submarines? How can they be verified? Will the Minister concentrate on the verification of cruise missiles apart from trying to achieve balanced reductions?

Mr. Luce: It is difficult to discover precisely the point of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. If he suggests that balanced reductions is the wrong way to proceed and that a Soviet monopoly is acceptable, I find that quite astonishing. Does he not realise that that in itself poses a threat to the security of our interests? As with every other kind of disarmament or arms control discussion, verification must be a salient part. It is essential that we should at least have the ability to ensure that agreements on both sides are being fulfilled. Surely he can see the point of that.

Several Hon. Members *rose* —

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a very important matter, but I must protect the business of the House. I shall allow these questions to continue until a quarter to five.

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): Should not the House remind itself, especially in this difficult and dangerous context, of two fundamental differences between the Soviet Union and the West? The first is that no Soviet Minister, official or general — and we do not know who it should be — will today or tomorrow be answering at any dispatch box in public for his country's policy. The second is that the Soviet people would not have had the opportunity that the American people had last week to see the film "The Day After" which showed in the most dramatic and lurid form the consequences of a nuclear war. If the Russians are to return to the negotiating table in Geneva, would it not be a very good idea to challenge them to show that film in the Soviet Union?

Mr. Luce: The difference between ourselves and Moscow in terms of our way of life is stark. There would be no opportunity to discuss, as we are doing in this Chamber in a democratic fashion and with a variety of views, how we can best achieve peace and security. It is that democratic way of life that we are trying to preserve by our policies.

With regard to the film to which my hon. Friend referred and which I believe is to be shown in this country shortly, our policies are designed to avoid just that kind of catastrophe. It is with that in mind that we are pursuing our present policy on defence and disarmament.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will the Minister stop misrepresenting the position and trying to mislead the country by equating the cruise missile with the SS20? The cruise missile is a cheap, accurate, new generation weapon with a first strike capability — [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish".] I regret that the Soviet Union has walked out of the negotiations, but some Labour Members in the recent defence debate warned that that was likely, if only because of President Reagan's ludicrous proposals — which were meant for home public consumption rather than serious negotiations — and the problem of verification. The Minister should not be ingenuous about this. Otherwise we might believe him if he continues to adopt the attitude that this is not a serious problem for the Soviet Union. If he accepts these points, how long will it be before he realises that his policies will merely result in nuclear war in our lifetime?

Mr. Luce: I cannot understand why some Labour Members constantly ignore what has happened over the last few years. The SS20s pose a threat to western Europe. We have a primary duty to defend ourselves. We merely wish to ensure that we have a credible deterrent policy. We are not talking about first strike. The NATO Alliance is concerned with the defence of the Western world. I and many others are disturbed and alarmed at the fact that people, such as the hon. Gentleman, seem to want to ignore the facts and evidence that confront us.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): The Russian walk out at Geneva should be deeply regretted. Nevertheless, should not Great Britain, with all its experience and expertise in world affairs, be involved in regular talks with Russia on other matters so that a useful and valuable line of communication can remain open to deal with these local difficulties?

Mr. Luce: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is what the Prime Minister recently said. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), was in Moscow earlier this year. My right hon. and learned Friend has visited Hungary, and the Prime Minister will be doing so shortly. Our objective is to have a dialogue with the Soviet Union, and we invite it to respond.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Is the Minister aware that the NATO Commander-in-Chief is reported to have said that if he were losing a traditional battle on European soil, he would use nuclear weapons, and that he had the political backing to do so? Will the Government give him that backing? Does not deployment of these weapons reflect the United States fallacy of a limited nuclear theatre war?

Mr. Luce: We are precisely in line with the policies pursued by previous Governments, including Labour Government. Our first priority is the defence of our way of life. At all costs, if we possibly can, we wish to avoid any conflict. That is what our policies are designed to achieve.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): One hopes that the breakdown in the talks will be temporary. However, has not every position adopted by the Soviet Union and every offer made by them, when unwrapped, effectively meant that it will continue to deploy several hundred SS20 warheads but that there will be no American deployment of Cruise or Pershing 2's?

Mr. Luce: That is exactly the point, and it is essential that people should understand it. The Russians wish to maintain a monopoly. They wish to prevent the United States from deploying these weapons and showing their commitment to the defence of Western Europe.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): As the Minister—and the Secretary of State in his statement on the arrival of Cruise in Britain—placed great emphasis on the withdrawal of a significant number of nuclear weapons from Europe, may I draw to his attention the comments of Mr. Richard Wagner to the Military Constructions appropriations Sub-Committee of the House of Representatives on 20 April, when he said:

"Withdrawing weapons which are needed goes counter to everything we are trying to do to strengthen our posture in Europe. We do, however, frequently review our nuclear weapons posture and as we modernise the stockpile we do withdraw older unneeded warheads. For example, we have in the last year or so withdrawn 1,000 older weapons which we no longer need"? Does the Minister agree that those weapons have been withdrawn not because they are a threat to the Russians, but because they are so old and out of date that they are probably a threat to our own troops? To represent that as a concession is damaging to our sincerity and negotiating posture. Does the Minister also recognise that far from imbalance—as agreed by a House of Representatives Congressional hearing recently—since START began 20 months ago, the United States has added—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should watch the clock.

Mr. Ashdown: This is my last point, Mr. Speaker.

Since those talks began, the United States has added 900 warheads to its stockpile whereas the Soviet Union has added 600.

Mr. Luce: I continue to find it extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman does not find it possible to welcome the fact that the NATO Alliance has decided to reduce the number of warheads. The latest decision is to reduce this by another 2,000 short range nuclear weapons. That in itself must contribute to peace, and is a demonstration of our sincerity and desire to make progress. While we are reducing weapons, there is an increase in weapons on the other side. One additional SS20 a week has been deployed. We are now asking for a genuine response from the Soviet Union. We want that, await it and are ready to respond to it.

Mr. Healey: Do not these exchanges show that we all deplore the Soviet withdrawal from the talks? That is why I described it as serious and disturbing news, and suggested the steps that the West might take to secure a resumption of the talks. I regret that the Minister did not respond to that suggestion. If the talks can be resumed, the West is bound to take the view that President Reagan now takes—that equivalence in nuclear weapons does not require equality in every particular nuclear weapon. The Russians have a substantial superiority in intercontinental land-based missiles, but the Americans have a superiority of 5,000 to the Russians' 2,000 in submarine-launched warheads. Those are the figures in the Scowcroft report. A similar equivalence exists in Europe. All previous American and British Governments have accepted that the Soviet monopoly of land-based missiles was offset by the Western allocation of submarine-based missiles to SACEUR.

Is the Minister aware that the systematic leaking of the critical Soviet proposal—the one that arose from the so-called "walk in the woods" a few months ago—by the United States, and the leaking by the German Government of the so-called "walk in the park" proposal damaged the credibility of Western Governments in the disarmament talks? It is essential that we should now resume the talks in private, accept that equivalence, not equality, is the objective, and take the first step to secure resumption by freezing further deployment of nuclear weapons on our side on condition that the Soviets resume talks. We should then seriously explore the Soviet offer to reduce their SS20s by half compared with the number they have deployed now, and the number of warheads by more than half compared with those deployed in 1979.

Mr. Luce: I welcome the fact that the right hon. Gentleman deplores the withdrawal. As he rightly said, we cannot make progress with the Soviet Union unless we have proper discussions round the negotiating table and in private. I agree that our first priority must be to persuade the Soviet Union to have these discussions in private.

Mr. Healey: On all sides.

Mr. Luce: I agree. That is the first priority. At the same time, I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman, with all his knowledge and experience, does not acknowledge that the Soviet Union is still insisting on an overwhelming monopoly of these weapons.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that we should seek a broad balance. It is essential that we have adequate deterrence. However, the right hon. Gentleman has not acknowledged the essential fact that the Soviet Union insist on having an overwhelming monopoly. Until

[Mr. Luce]

the Russians agree to talk about a balanced reduction of forces, it is difficult to envisage how we can make progress.

Emphysema (Compensation of Coal Miners)

4.50 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford):
I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide compensation for mineworkers under the Industrial Injuries Acts for emphysema.

Having discussed at some length the problem of the arms race and the millions of pounds that it will probably cost to blow us off the face of the earth, it is ironic that I, in my meak and mild way, should request the Government to provide a few measly pounds to protect and comfort the living.

Hon. Members will be aware that this is the third time that I have brought this matter to the attention of the House. I presented a Bill in October 1982 and a further Bill in March 1983. I make no apology for my persistence. I consider that those who suffer from emphysema and have become incapacitated, because they are or were coal miners, should be recognised as suffering from an industrial injury.

Miners suffer from many industrial diseases—for example pneumoconiosis and silicosis—which are recognised as being industrial illnesses. However, some are not. Unfortunately, emphysema falls into the latter category. The reason is that there is insufficient evidence to show that it is an occupational rather than a generalised disease. Recent research has shown that emphysema should no longer be classified in this way. It must be put alongside industrial diseases in the primary class, and thereby enable sufferers to receive compensation. As a result of the overwhelming research carried out in this sphere, it is unlikely that subsequent research will reveal anything new. In October 1982 I presented a detailed list of research. I do not intend to cite that detail again. I assure the House that it was scholarly and decisive.

Yesterday morning I received a letter from a constituent who is a consultant in respiratory diseases. He referred to the case of a non-smoking miner who was refused compensation by a pneumoconiosis panel. The same panel deals with cases of emphysema. He considered that the panel's reasoning for refusing compensation was poor. The letter states:

"Whilst I would accept the assessment of the pneumoconiosis panel that this man only qualifies for 10 per cent. compensation with regard to pneumoconiosis, I think that his respiratory disability is almost entirely related to his work in the colliery, and as such that it severely limits his exercisability.

I would strongly support his claim to receive further compensation on the basis of an obstructive airways disease related to the pneumoconiosis."

I challenge the authority of the pneumoconiosis panels. Rumour has it that many such panels consist of retired medical practitioners who need ready cash. I wonder how many members of the panels in Sheffield or in other parts of the country have specific qualifications in respiratory research or have attended courses on this subject in the past five years?

An editorial in *The Lancet* in March, which relied on a body of recent research, stated that emphysema in coal workers was an occupational illness and that sufferers should receive compensation. All hon. Members are aware that *The Lancet* has great authority. Eight months have

WEST GERMAN VOTE PAVES WAY FOR SOVIET WALKOUT

GENEVA, WEDNESDAY - WEST GERMANY'S DECISION TO GO AHEAD AND INSTALL PERSHING NUCLEAR MISSILES AFTER MONTHS OF POLITICAL SOUL-SEARCHING PAVED THE WAY FOR A SOVIET WALKOUT FROM EAST-WEST ARMS REDUCTION TALKS TODAY.

WHILE THE UNITED STATES BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF AND SAID IT WELCOMED LAST NIGHT'S 286 TO 226 BONN PARLIAMENT VOTE, NATO SOURCES IN GENEVA SAID THERE WERE SIGNS THAT THE KREMLIN WOULD USE THE DECISION TO WALK OUT FROM TWO AND-A-HALF YEARS OF TALKS ON LIMITING NUCLEAR MISSILES IN EUROPE.

THE FIRST OF A PLANNED TOTAL OF 108 AMERICAN PERSHING-2 MISSILES WERE EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN WEST GERMANY TODAY FOR DELIVERY TO TWO U.S. MILITARY BASES NEAR FRANKFURT AND STUTTGART. SECURITY MEASURES AT THE TWO BASES WERE STEPPED UP IN CASE OF FRESH PROTESTS BY ANTI-NUCLEAR DEMONSTRATORS.

SOVIET OFFICIALS DECLINED TO COMMENT ON NATO PREDICTIONS OF A POSSIBLE WALKOUT, BUT THEY POINTED TO SOVIET PRESIDENT YURI ANDROPOV'S STATEMENT THAT THE APPEARANCE OF NEW AMERICAN PERSHING AND CRUISE MISSILES IN EUROPE WOULD MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTINUE THE GENEVA TALKS.