



From Jerry Wiggin, T.D., M.P.
HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Tel. 01-219 4466

21 30th. September 1986

cc: Mr. Alison

Dear Prime Minister,

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cc: ()
AL ()
MC ()*

It is over a year ago that the Government was informed of the difficulties that faced Westlands. Since then the Company has been restructured and is currently busy and profitable. The future of most of its divisions looks good. The exception is helicopters where the underlying problem remains. Because several Government Departments are involved I hope that you will take a personal interest in the resolution of this problem which is of fundamental importance to the defence of the nation as well as having huge electoral implications in the West Country. I am writing seperately to George Younger, Paul Channon and Norman Tebbit and rather than repeat the arguments I am enclosing copies of those letters.

At a recent meeting between Sir John Cuckney, George Younger and Paul Channon the case was set out in detail and I assume that there will be collective consideration of the matter. It is imperative that this should be very soon or there is a real danger of another ghastly row if Westlands start laying people off before the Government's wishes are known.

I believe the Services are wrong about the requirement and quick to forget the lessons that should have been learnt in the Falklands. You will remember how the lack of helicopters delayed the advance from San Carlos and the repercussions of the loss of the Chinooks in the Atlantic Conveyer. The Russians and the Americans take a very different view and I believe they are right.

While I do have a major Constituency interest in this matter it is a fact that only about one third of each machine is actually made by Westlands and the rest by about ninety companies, some sixty of whom have Conservative M.P.s. I do hope that this matter can now be resolved internally and expeditiously.

Yours ever

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M. P.
10, Downing Street,
London S. W. 1



From Jerry Wiggin, T. D., M. P.
HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA
30th. September 1986

Dear *George*,

You recently had a meeting with Paul Channon to hear from Sir John Cuckney about the problems that face the helicopter division of Westlands. You will remember that Westlands have their product support and spares factory in Weston-super-Mare which is the largest employer in the town.

I fully accept that it is not the business of your Department to support ailing industries, nor is it the business of Westlands to try and tell you what you should be ordering. On the other hand, a single supplier of this sort does need to know what is required and if orders are not forthcoming shortly to cover the crucial period then I am in no doubt that Sir John means to severely curtail helicopter production which will have serious implications for the EH101 programme and cause widespread repercussions in other high technology companies.

It is not just for Constituency reasons that I press you on this and you are already aware of my view that the Services are seriously short of helicopters. We went through this when you kindly saw me the other day and I made some positive suggestions as to how the problem might be solved. I appreciate that you are awaiting advice from the central staff but this seems to be a very long time coming, particularly since the subject ought to be under continuous review. Agreement had been reached on an Air Staff Target, but this was abandoned a year ago, and still you do not have advice before you. Could it be that those who oppose an increase in helicopter numbers are deliberately delaying things? You will shortly be into L.T.C. time and if the Government delays a decision for even a few weeks it will be claimed that everything is frozen and nothing can be done.

The detailed case has been put to you by Westlands and I wished to add my view that this is more than just a matter of the fate of one part of one company but is of crucial importance to the defence of the nation.

I have also written to the Prime Minister, Norman Tebbit and Paul Channon and enclose copies of those letters.

Yours ever

The Rt. Hon. George Younger, M. P.
The Secretary of State,
Ministry of Defence,
Whitehall, London SW1 2HB.

Jerry



From Jerry Wiggin, T. D. , M. P.
HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

30th. September 1986

Dear *Paul,*

You recently attended a meeting with George Younger to hear from Sir John Cuckney about the problems that face the helicopter division of Westlands. You may know that Westlands have their product support and spares factory in Weston-super-Mare which is the largest employer in the town. If they were to retreat into Yeovil and shut that factory the consequences would be far reaching.

Everything to do with aerospace is expensive and mostly controversial and I appreciate that taking a view about such things is one of your heaviest crosses. Sir John is in real earnest when he seeks guidance from the Government since I am in no doubt that he is now in a position to serve his shareholders properly without continuing in helicopter production.

I believe that the country would not understand if we allowed U.K. helicopter production to cease after all the recent fuss and even if this is an emotional reaction it would be most unwise to trigger it off. Technically the company has made great strides and the recent capture of the world speed record shows it is the world leader in blade technology which is one of the key factors in helicopter design.

The gap in the order book is only of some two years duration and compared with some of the other industries which this Government has helped the problem is relatively small. Your Department has already invested considerable sums in the industry and this is certainly not the time to pull out if a satisfactory return is to be achieved.

The political implications are also serious and I have covered these in my letter to Norman. The greatest disaster would be if there were to be a squabble between the DTI and the MOD and the baby left with the bathwater. Some ninety companies provide about two thirds of the value of a helicopter with Westlands at the centre of a complex operation that is nearly all in the forefront of technology. They are also tied in to American and European co-operation in a way that must be unique and leaves them with a very real incentive to get over this particular hurdle. I suggest that the country cannot throw up this opportunity either. Surely after more than a year considering the problem there can now be a quick and favourable decision.

I am enclosing copies of letters to the Prime Minister, George Younger and Norman Tebbit on the same subject.

The Rt. Hon. Paul Channon M. P.
The Secretary of State,
Department of Trade and Industry.

Yours ever
Jerry

From: Jerry Wiggin, T.D., M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

~~30th~~ September, 1986.

Dear *Norman*,

You will be aware that there has been a recent meeting between George Younger and Paul Channon at which Sir John Cuckney, Chairman of Westlands, set out the problems that face the helicopter division of that Company. You may know that Westlands have their product support and spares factory in Weston-super-Mare which is the largest employer in the town and involves some 1,500 jobs.

A reduction in the work force of Westlands by 2,500 would almost certainly mean that they would shut the factory in Weston-super-Mare and retreat into Yeovil. This would be a financial and economic catastrophe for the town and would have severe political repercussions. Of the three major bases of Westlands, the Isle of Wight and Yeovil already have Liberal Members and I really could not give a very optimistic forecast about my own chances if Westlands were to close in Weston-super-Mare. I gather that our candidate in the Isle of Wight is making a good impression and I hope that we may win back that seat. Westlands is the largest employer in the Isle of Wight and there might well be some backlash to our disadvantage.

One third of the value of an helicopter is actually made by Westlands while some 90 other companies spread around the country provide the rest of the work. Some 60 of these have Conservative Members of Parliament so this is not just a plea from a constituency Member. The whole West Country is a difficult area for employment at the best of times and such a major change would have a huge impact on the Counties of Somerset, Avon and Dorset.

I appreciate that there are problems of political philosophy involved in this matter but I must emphasize that great damage will be caused to the Party if an early solution is not reached.

I have written to the Prime Minister, George Younger and Paul Channon dealing with their aspects of the problem and I enclose copies of these letters.

Yours ever

The Right Hon. Norman Tebbit, M.P.
Conservative Central Office,
32 Smith Square,
LONDON SW1A 0AA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerry Wiggin', with a large circular flourish at the end.