

FALKLAND SITUATION

We brought the Lobby up-to-date on latest events, drawing attention to the interviews given by Mr Nott and Mr Luce to "Weekend World" and "The World this Weekend" respectively, and to the broadcast to be made by Lord Carrington to the Falkland Islands through the BBC World Service at 11.10 pm BST that evening. This last would take the form of a message of encouragement and assurance.

We reported that the Royal Marines detachment on South Georgia had been overwhelmed, destroying a helicopter and damaging a ship of the Argentinian Forces in the process. While there had been casualties on the Argentinian side, we said we believed there had been none sustained by the Royal Marines.

We reported that the Prime Minister had been working at No 10 all day on the issue, that Lord Carrington had been at the FCO and that Mr Nott, after his "Weekend World" interview, had gone to Portsmouth to visit ships of the Task Force and watch preparations for sea.

We said that the Governor of the Falkland Islands and the Royal Marines that had been taken off the Islands would return to the United Kingdom at RAF Brize Norton the following day by VC-10. There would be a mute photo-facility to cover their arrival. The Governor and the two Royal Marines Majors would report to the Prime Minister during the late morning. They would give a Press Conference at the FCO at 3.30 pm.

The MoD was arranging for a Press party to join the ships at Portsmouth. The party would include a TV crew with satellite transmission equipment.

We confirmed that Prince Andrew was with Invincible and would sail with her; that Argentina's financial assets in the UK had been frozen; that HMS Endurance remained in Falkland Islands' waters.

We also gave details of the UN Security Council Resolution voting pattern.

The Prime Minister would give a television interview to ITN's "News at Ten" the following day. This had been arranged a long time ago.

In response to questions we said a further debate in the House seemed likely, and agreed Wednesday as the probable day. We had no knowledge of any plans for further statements. We could not confirm that the research station on South Georgia had been taken over, nor that some Marines remained on the main island. There had been no meetings of Ministers during the day, but the Prime Minister had talked to colleagues by telephone. There had been no call to or from the White House.

To suggestions that Mr Nott had appeared bellicose on TV we reminded the Lobby of the views expressed from all sections of the House during the debate. The Government stood by its determination to rid the Falklands of the invaders. The fleet had been ordered to sail.

Asked about diplomatic links we confirmed that it was hoped to establish a British interests section in the Swiss Embassy in Argentina.

Asked about declaration of war we repeated the point that the UN Charter covered the situation. There had been an act of aggression to

LABBY BRIEFING

time: 5 PM date: 4.4.82

which self-defence was a legitimate response. We had the support of the UN, NATO and the EC. President Mitterrand had talked to the Prime Minister the day before. We could not go into details on diplomatic moves and on the question of EC countries breaking off diplomatic relations with Argentina we said that was a matter for their Governments.

We refuted firmly any suggestions of Cabinet changes. The Prime Minister was not going to criticise Ministers. We drew attention to Mr Nott's remarks on TV about the confidence of his Parliamentary colleagues. Nobody had put their job at the disposal of the Prime Minister. We refused to be moved by suggestions of reorganisation or sackings once the crisis was over, nor by suggestions that the Prime Minister must be getting the "strong messages" about the future of Mr Nott and Lord Carrington from backbenchers through Mr Gow and the Whips.

Asked about effects on spending, we agreed that clearly present moves would inevitably increase costs. The contingency fund could be drawn on if necessary. We could not confirm that the Chancellor and Chief Secretary had been involved in discussions, adding that economic considerations were not a factor in planning the UK response to Argentinian aggression.

On HMS Endurance we pointed out that the ship had been in Falkland waters at the time of the invasion. Arguments over the future of the vessel were shown to be irrelevant. That vessel could never achieve success in the face of such an invasion.

We would not be drawn into speculation about long term logistical problems if the Falklands were restored, nor on blockades or 200 mile limits. We had no indication that publication of the Defence White Paper would be deferred.

We did not know of any moves against the Argentinian national airline operating to the UK, but referred to suspension of exports of military equipment and of export credit.

The Prime Minister had not seen the Leader of the Opposition. Of course she hoped to carry the whole House with her on present moves to restore sovereignty in the Falklands.

HC

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Saturday
3 April 1982



HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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House of Commons

Saturday 3 April 1982

The House met at Eleven o'clock, notice having been given by MR. SPEAKER, pursuant to Standing Order No. 122 (Earlier meeting of the House in certain circumstances).

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Falkland Islands (Personal Statement)

11.5 am

The Lord Privy Seal (Mr. Humphrey Atkins): Following my statement to the House at 11 o'clock yesterday, I said in answer to supplementary questions from the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) and my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn and Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) that we had been in touch with the governor of the Falkland Islands half an hour before I make my statement. That was inaccurate. We had in fact been in touch two hours earlier, at 8.30 am our time. No invasion had then taken place, and when I made my statement I had no knowledge of any change in the situation.

I very much regret that I inadvertently misled the House, and I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to set the record straight and to apologise to the House.

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at this day's sitting, Mr. Speaker do adjourn the House at Two o'clock without putting any Question.—[Mr. Jopling.]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Stoddart) gave me notice of a manuscript amendment, which I do not propose to accept. The manuscript amendment proposes that the sitting should continue until 5 o'clock. If the House wishes to vote on the motion, I think that it had better do so straight away to avoid taking time out of the main debate. If the motion were rejected, we would have an open-ended debate.

11.7 am

Mr. David Stoddart (Swindon): I wish to speak briefly to the motion and to give my reasons for asking that the manuscript amendment be accepted.

The motion proposes a three-hour debate. Quite naturally, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other senior Front Bench spokesmen will wish to put the point of view of the Government and of the Opposition. The House is packed with Privy Councillors, ex-Prime Ministers and ex-Foreign Secretaries who are entitled to give the House the benefit of their long experience. There will therefore be very little time left for Back-Bench Members to give their views and those of their constituents whom they will have consulted yesterday about the grave crisis facing this country and the international terrorism perpetrated on the Falkland Islands by the Argentine Government.

I hope, therefore, that the House will vote against the motion so that we may have an adequate discussion on this matter.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 115.

Division No. 117]

[11.07 am

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon H. (S'thorne)
Atkins, Robert (Preston N)
Atkinson, David (B'm'th, E)
Baker, Kenneth (St.M'bone)
Banks, Robert
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W. (Buckingham)
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter (W'wich W)
Bowden, Andrew
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John (Winchester)
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burden, Sir Frederick
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John (Luton West)
Carlisle, Kenneth (Lincoln)
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. (R'c'n)
Chalker, Mrs. Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon. Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. (Croydon S)
Clegg, Sir Walter
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Costain, Sir Albert
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Denshore
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert (Dartford)
Durant, Tony
Eden, Rt Hon Sir John
Edwards, Rt Hon N. (P'broke)
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Reginald
Faith, Mrs Sheila
Fell, Sir Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Geoffrey
Fisher, Sir Nigel
Fletcher, A. (Ed'nb'gh N)
Fletcher-Cooke, Sir Charles
Forman, Nigel
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, Peter (South Angus)
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, George (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, Trietan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodhew, Sir Victor
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Anthony (Harrow C)
Greenway, Harry
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Michael (Salisbury)
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hasselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hayhoe, Barney
Heddie, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
Holland, Philip (Carlton)
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph (Norfolk)
Hunt, David (Wirral)
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellott-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kitson, Sir Timothy
Lang, Ian
LeMarchant, Spencer
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim (Beeston)
Lewis, Kenneth (Rutland)
Lloyd, Peter (Fareham)
Loveridge, John
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
Macmillan, Rt Hon M.
McNair-Wilson, M. (N'bury)
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael (Arundel)
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal (B'grove)
Mills, Iain (Meriden)
Mills, Peter (West Devon)
Mitchell, David (Basingstoke)
Moate, Roger
Moore, John
Morris, M. (N'hampton S)
Moyle, Rt Hon Roland
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Normanton, Tom
Nott, Rt Hon John
Onslow, Cranley

Rest omitted

Falkland Islands

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Jopling.]

1.19 am

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): The House meets this Saturday to respond to a situation of great gravity. We are here because, for the first time for many years, British sovereign territory has been invaded by a foreign power. After several days of rising tension in our relations with Argentina, that country's Armed Forces attacked the Falkland Islands yesterday and established military control of the islands.

Yesterday was a day of rumour and counter-rumour. Throughout the day we had no communication from the Government of the Falklands. Indeed, the last message that we received was at 21.55 hours on Thursday night, 1 April. Yesterday morning at 8.33 am we sent a telegram which was acknowledged. At 8.45 am all communications ceased. I shall refer to that again in a moment. By late afternoon yesterday it became clear that an Argentine invasion had taken place and that the lawful British Government of the islands had been usurped.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning totally this unprovoked aggression by the Government of Argentina against British territory. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".] It has not a shred of justification and not a scrap of legality.

It was not until 8.30 this morning, our time, when I was able to speak to the governor, who had arrived in Uruguay, that I learnt precisely what had happened. He told me that the Argentines had landed at approximately 6 am Falkland's time, 10 am our time. One party attacked the capital from the landward side and another from the seaward side. The governor then sent a signal to us which we did not receive.

Communications had ceased at 8.45 am our time. It is common for atmospheric conditions to make communications with Port Stanley difficult. Indeed, we had been out of contact for a period the previous night.

The governor reported that the Marines, in the defence of Government House, were superb. He said that they acted in the best traditions of the Royal Marines. They inflicted casualties, but those defending Government House suffered none. He had kept the local people informed of what was happening through a small local transmitter which he had in Government House. He is relieved that the islanders heeded his advice to stay indoors. Fortunately, as far as he is aware, there were no civilian casualties. When he left the Falklands, he said that the people were in tears. They do not want to be Argentine. He said that the islanders are still tremendously loyal. I must say that I have every confidence in the governor and the action that he took.

I must tell the House that the Falkland Islands and their dependencies remain British territory. No aggression and no invasion can alter that simple fact. It is the Government's objective to see that the islands are freed from occupation and are returned to British administration at the earliest possible moment.

Argentina has, of course, long disputed British sovereignty over the islands. We have absolutely no doubt about our sovereignty, which has been continuous since 1833. Nor have we any doubt about the unequivocal wishes of the Falkland Islanders, who are British in stock

and tradition, and they wish to remain British in allegiance. We cannot allow the democratic rights of the islanders to be denied by the territorial ambitions of Argentina.

Over the past 15 years, successive British Governments have held a series of meetings with the Argentine Government to discuss the dispute. In many of these meetings elected representatives of the islanders have taken part. We have always made it clear that their wishes were paramount and that there would be no change in sovereignty without their consent and without the approval of the House.

The most recent meeting took place this year in New York at the end of February between my hon. Friend the Member for Shorham, (Mr. Luce) accompanied by two members of the islands council, and the Deputy Foreign Secretary of Argentina. The atmosphere at the meeting was cordial and positive, and a communiqué was issued about future negotiating procedures. Unfortunately, the joint communiqué which had been agreed was not published in Buenos Aires.

There was a good deal of bellicose comment in the Argentine press in late February and early March, about which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs expressed his concern in the House on 3 March following the Anglo-Argentine talks in New York. However, this has not been an uncommon situation in Argentina over the years. It would have been absurd to dispatch the fleet every time there was bellicose talk in Buenos Aires. There was no good reason on 3 March to think that an invasion was being planned, especially against the background of the constructive talks on which my hon. Friend had just been engaged. The joint communiqué on behalf of the Argentine deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and my hon. Friend read:

"The meeting took place in a cordial and positive spirit. The two sides reaffirmed their resolve to find a solution to the sovereignty dispute and considered in detail an Argentine proposal for procedures to make better progress in this sense."

There had, of course, been previous incidents affecting sovereignty before the one in South Georgia, to which I shall refer in a moment. In December 1976 the Argentines illegally set up a scientific station on one of the dependencies within the Falklands group—Southern Thule. The Labour Government attempted to solve the matter through diplomatic exchanges, but without success. The Argentines remained there and are still there.

Two weeks ago—on 19 March—the latest in this series of incidents affecting sovereignty occurred; and the deterioration in relations between the British and Argentinian Governments which culminated in yesterday's Argentinian invasion began. The incident appeared at the start to be relatively minor. But we now know it was the beginning of much more.

The commander of the British Antarctic Survey base at Grytviken on South Georgia—a dependency of the Falkland Islands over which the United Kingdom has exercised sovereignty since 1775 when the island was discovered by Captain Cook—reported to us that an Argentine Navy cargo ship had landed about 60 Argentines at nearby Leith harbour. They had set up camp and hoisted the Argentine flag. They were there to carry out a valid commercial contract to remove scrap metal from a former whaling station.

The leader of the commercial expedition, Davidoff, had told our embassy in Buenos Aires that he would be going

[The Prime Minister]

to South Georgia in March. He was reminded of the need to obtain permission from the immigration authorities on the island. He did not do so. The base commander told the Argentines that they had no right to land on South Georgia without the permission of the British authorities. They should go either to Grytviken to get the necessary clearances, or leave. The ship and some 50 of them left on 22 March. Although about 10 Argentines remained behind, this appeared to reduce the tension.

In the meantime, we had been in touch with the Argentine Government about the incident. They claimed to have had no prior knowledge of the landing and assured us that there were no Argentine military personnel in the party. For our part we made it clear that, while we had no wish to interfere in the operation of a normal commercial contract, we could not accept the illegal presence of these people on British territory.

We asked the Argentine Government either to arrange for the departure of the remaining men or to ensure that they obtained the necessary permission to be there. Because we recognised the potentially serious nature of the situation, HMS "Endurance" was ordered to the area. We told the Argentine Government that if they failed to regularise the position of the party on South Georgia or to arrange for their departure HMS "Endurance" would take them off, without using force, and return them to Argentina.

This was, however, to be a last resort. We were determined that this apparently minor problem of 10 people on South Georgia in pursuit of a commercial contract should not be allowed to escalate and we made it plain to the Argentine Government that we wanted to achieve a peaceful resolution of the problem by diplomatic means. To help in this, HMS "Endurance" was ordered not to approach the Argentine party at Leith but to go to Grytviken.

But it soon became clear that the Argentine Government had little interest in trying to solve the problem. On 25 March another Argentine navy ship arrived at Leith to deliver supplies to the 10 men ashore. Our ambassador in Buenos Aires sought an early response from the Argentine Government to our previous requests that they should arrange for the men's departure. This request was refused. Last Sunday, on Sunday 28 March, the Argentine Foreign Minister sent a message to my right hon. and noble Friend the Foreign Secretary refusing outright to regularise the men's position. Instead it restated Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and their dependencies.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary then sent a message to the United States Secretary of State asking him to intervene and to urge restraint.

By the beginning of this week it was clear that our efforts to solve the South Georgia dispute through the usual diplomatic channels were getting nowhere. Therefore, on Wednesday 31 March my right hon. and noble Friend the Foreign Secretary proposed to the Argentine Foreign Minister that we should dispatch a special emissary to Buenos Aires.

Later that day we received information which led us to believe that a large number of Argentine ships, including an aircraft carrier, destroyers, landing craft, troop carriers and submarines were heading for Port Stanley. I contacted

President Reagan that evening and asked him to intervene with the Argentine President directly. We promised, in the meantime, to take no action to escalate the dispute for fear of precipitating—[*Interruption*]*—*the very event that our efforts were directed to avoid. May I remind Opposition Members—[*Interruption*]*—*what happened when, during the lifetime of their Government—

Mr. J. W. Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): We did not lose the Falklands.

The Prime Minister—Southern Thule was occupied. It was occupied in 1976. The House was not even informed by the then Government until 1978, when, in response to questioning by my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce), now Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands) said:

"We have sought the resolve the issue through diplomatic exchanges between the two Governments. That is infinitely preferable to public denunciations and public statements when we are trying to achieve a practical result to the problem that has arisen."*—*[*Official Report*, 24 May 1978, Vol. 950, c. 2550-51.]

Mr. Edward Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil): The right hon. Lady is talking about a piece of rock in the most southerly part of the dependencies, which is totally uninhabited and which smells of large accumulations of penguin and other bird droppings. There is a vast difference—a whole world of difference—between the 1,800 people now imprisoned by Argentine invaders and that argument. The right hon. Lady should have the grace to accept that.

The Prime Minister: We are talking about the sovereignty of British territory—[*Interruption*]*—*which was infringed in 1976. The House was not even informed of it until 1978. We are talking about a further incident in South Georgia which—as I have indicated—seemed to be a minor incident at the time. There is only a British Antarctic scientific survey there and there was a commercial contract to remove a whaling station. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that had I come to the House at that time and said that we had a problem on South Georgia with 10 people who had landed with a contract to remove a whaling station, and had I gone on to say that we should send HMS "Invincible", I should have been accused of war mongering and sabre rattling.

Information about the Argentine fleet did not arrive until Wednesday. Argentina is, of course, very close to the Falklands—a point that the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil cannot and must not ignore—and its Navy can sail there very quickly. On Thursday, the Argentine Foreign Minister rejected the idea of an emissary and told our ambassador that the diplomatic channel, as a means of solving this dispute, was closed. President Reagan had a very long telephone conversation, of some 50 minutes, with the Argentine President, but his strong representations fell on deaf ears. I am grateful to him and to Secretary Haig for their strenuous and persistent efforts on our behalf.

On Thursday, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Perez De Cuellar, summoned both British and Argentine permanent representatives to urge both countries to refrain from the use or threat of force in the South Atlantic. Later that evening we sought an emergency meeting of the Security Council. We accepted the appeal of its President for restraint. The Argentines

said nothing. On Friday, as the House knows, the Argentines invaded the Falklands and I have given a precise account of everything we knew, or did not know about that situation. There were also reports that yesterday the Argentines also attacked South Georgia, where HMS "Endurance" had left a detachment of 22 Royal Marines. Our information is that on 2 April an Argentine naval transport vessel informed the base commander at Grytviken that an important message would be passed to him after 11 o'clock today our time. It is assumed that this message will ask the base commander to surrender.

Before indicating some of the measures that the Government have taken in response to the Argentinian invasion, I should like to make three points. First, even if ships had been instructed to sail the day that the Argentines landed on South Georgia to clear the whaling station, the ships could not possibly have got to Port Stanley before the invasion. [Interruption.] Opposition Members may not like it, but that is a fact.

Secondly, there have been several occasions in the past when an invasion has been threatened. The only way of being certain to prevent an invasion would have been to keep a very large fleet close to the Falklands, when we are some 8,000 miles away from base. No Government have ever been able to do that, and the cost would be enormous.

Mr. Eric Ogden (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the right hon. Lady say what has happened to HMS "Endurance"?

The Prime Minister: HMS "Endurance" is in the area. It is not for me to say precisely where, and the hon. Gentleman would not wish me to do so.

Thirdly, aircraft unable to land on the Falklands, because of the frequently changing weather, would have had little fuel left and, ironically, their only hope of landing safely would have been to divert to Argentina. Indeed, all of the air and most sea supplies for the Falklands come from Argentina, which is but 400 miles away compared with our 8,000 miles.

That is the background against which we have to make decisions and to consider what action we can best take. I cannot tell the House precisely what dispositions have been made—some ships are already at sea, others were put on immediate alert on Thursday evening.

The Government have now decided that a large task force will sail as soon as all preparations are complete. HMS "Invincible" will be in the lead and will leave port on Monday.

I stress that I cannot foretell what orders the task force will receive as it proceeds. That will depend on the situation at the time. Meanwhile, we hope that our continuing diplomatic efforts, helped by our many friends, will meet with success.

The Foreign Ministers of the European Community member States yesterday condemned the intervention and urged withdrawal. The NATO Council called on both sides to refrain from force and continue diplomacy.

The United Nations Security Council met again yesterday and will continue its discussions today. [Laughter.] Opposition Members laugh. They would have been the first to urge a meeting of the Security Council if we had not called one. They would have been the first to urge restraint and to urge a solution to the problem by diplomatic means. They would have been the first to accuse us of sabre rattling and war mongering.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (West Lothian): The right hon. Lady referred to our many friends. Have we any friends in South America on this issue?

The Prime Minister: Doubtless our friends in South America will make their views known during any proceedings at the Security Council. I believe that many countries in South America will be prepared to condemn the invasion of the Falklands Islands by force.

We are now reviewing all aspects of the relationship between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The Argentine charge d'affaires and his staff were yesterday instructed to leave within four days.

As an appropriate precautionary and, I hope, temporary measure, the Government have taken action to freeze Argentine financial assets held in this country. An order will be laid before Parliament today under the Emergency Laws (Re-enactments and Repeals) Act 1964 blocking the movement of gold, securities or funds held in the United Kingdom by the Argentine Government or Argentine residents.

As a further precautionary measure, the ECGD has suspended new export credit cover for the Argentine. It is the Government's earnest wish that a return to good sense and the normal rules of international behaviour on the part of the Argentine Government will obviate the necessity for action across the full range of economic relations.

We shall be reviewing the situation and be ready to take further steps that we deem appropriate and we shall, of course, report to the House.

The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. They are few in number, but they have the right to live in peace, to choose their own way of life and to determine their own allegiance. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. It is the wish of the British people and the duty of Her Majesty's Government to do everything that we can to uphold that right. That will be our hope and our endeavour and, I believe, the resolve of every Member of the House.

11.45 am

Mr. Michael Foot (Ebbw. Vale): It was obviously essential that the House of Commons should be recalled on this occasion. I thank the Prime Minister for the decision to do so. I can well understand the anxiety and impatience of many of my hon. Friends on the Back Benches who voted in the Division a few minutes ago, and who desire to have full and proper time to examine all the aspects of this issue. I shall return to that aspect of the matter in a few minutes.

I first wish to set on record as clearly as I possibly can what we believe to be the international rights and wrongs of this matter, because I believe that one of the purposes of the House being assembled on this occasion is to make that clear not only to the people in our country but to people throughout the world.

The rights and the circumstances of the people in the Falkland Islands must be uppermost in our minds. There is no question in the Falkland Islands of any colonial dependence or anything of the sort. It is a question of people who wish to be associated with this country and who have built their whole lives on the basis of association with this country. We have a moral duty, a political duty and every other kind of duty to ensure that that is sustained.

The people of the Falkland Islands have the absolute right to look to us at this moment of their desperate plight, just as they have looked to us over the past 150 years. They are faced with an act of naked, unqualified aggression, carried out in the most shameful and disreputable circumstances. Any guarantee from this invading force is utterly worthless—as worthless as any of the guarantees that are given by this same Argentine junta to its own people.

We can hardly forget that thousands of innocent people fighting for their political rights in Argentine are in prison and have been tortured and debased. We cannot forget that fact when our friends and fellow citizens in the Falkland Islands are suffering as they are at this moment.

On the merits of the matter, we hope that the question is understood throughout the world. In that respect I believe that the Government were right to take the matter to the United Nations. It would have been delinquency if they had not, because that is the forum in which, we have agreed that such matters of international right and international claim should be stated.

Whatever else the Government have done—I shall come to that in a moment—or not done, I believe that it was essential for them to take our case to the United Nations and to present it with all the force and power of advocacy at the command of this country. The decision and the vote in the United Nations will take place in an hour or two's time. I must say to people there that we in this country, as a whole, irrespective of our party affiliations, will examine the votes most carefully.

I was interested to hear how strongly the President of France spoke out earlier this morning. I hope that every other country in the world will speak in a similar way.

If, at the United Nations this afternoon, no such declaration were made—I know that it would be only a declaration at first, but there might be the possibility of action there later—not merely would it be a gross injury to the rights of the people of the Falkland Islands, not merely would it be an injury to the people of this country, who have a right to have their claims upheld in the United Nations, but it would be a serious injury to the United Nations itself. It would enhance the dangers that similar, unprovoked aggressions could occur in other parts of the world.

That is one of the reasons why we are determined to ensure that we examine this matter in full and uphold the rights of our country throughout the world, and the claim of our country to be a defender of people's freedom throughout the world, particularly those who look to us for special protection, as do the people in the Falkland Islands.

I deal next with the Government's conduct in the matter. What has happened to British diplomacy? The explanations given by the right hon. Lady, when she managed to rise above some of her own party arguments—they were not quite the exclusive part of her speech—were not very full and not very clear. They will need to be made a good deal more ample in the days to come.

The right hon. Lady did not quote fully the response of Lord Carrington, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, at his press conference yesterday. She referred to the Minister of State, who, according to Lord Carrington,

"had just been in New York discussing with Mr. Ross, his opposite number, the question of resumption of talks with the

Argentine Government about the problems of the Falkland Islands. And they had had a talk and come to an agreement. Mr. Ross went back to the Argentine and a number of things came up and they sent a message which"

I emphasise the words—
"I have not yet had time to reply to."

Lord Carrington added:
"So there was every reason to suppose that the Argentines were interested in negotiations."

Those talks took place on 27 February. The right hon. Lady gave an account of these negotiations. But from what has happened it seems that the British Government have been fooled by the way in which the Argentine junta has gone about its business. The Government must answer for that as well as for everything else.

What about British communications and British intelligence? *The Guardian* states today in a leading article:

"This country devotes a greater proportion of its annual output to its armed forces than any other Western country, with the exception of the United States. It has extensive diplomatic and intelligence gathering activities. And all of that gave Mrs. Thatcher, Lord Carrington and Mr. Nott precisely no effective cards when the Argentine navy moved."

I should be very surprised to hear, because of some of the previous debates and discussions on the crises that have arisen with the Argentine, that the British Government did not have better intelligence than that. So good was our intelligence that although the Prime Minister now tells us that the invasion took place at 10 am yesterday, the Lord Privy Seal—I know that he has apologised for some of his remarks—told the House of Commons and the British people:

"We are taking appropriate military and diplomatic measures to sustain our rights under international law and in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations charter."—(*Official Report*, 2 April 1982; Vol. 21, c. 571.)

When he was saying that, it was the Argentine Government who were taking appropriate military, not diplomatic, measures to enforce their will.

The right hon. Lady, the Secretary of State for Defence and the whole Government will have to give a very full account of what happened, how their diplomacy was conducted and why we did not have the information to which we are entitled when expenditure takes place on such a scale. Above all, more important than the question of what happened to British diplomacy or to British intelligence, is what happened to our power to act. The right hon. Lady seemed to dismiss that question. It cannot be dismissed. Of course this country has the power to act—short, often, of taking military measures. Indeed, we have always been told, as I understand it, that the purpose of having some military power is to deter. The power to deter and the capacity to deter were both required in the situation.

The previous Government had to deal with the same kind of dictatorial regime in the Argentine, the same kind of threat to the people of the Falkland Islands, and the same kinds of problems as those with which the Government have had to wrestle over the past weeks and months. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South-East (Mr. Callaghan) compressed the whole position into the question that he put to the Government only last Tuesday. I shall read his remarks to the House and I ask the House to mark every word. This was the factious Opposition. This was an Opposition Member seeking to sustain the Government if the Government were doing their duty.

My right hon. Friend said:

I support the Government's attempts to solve the problem by diplomatic means, which is clearly the best and most sensible of approaching the problem, but is the Minister aware that there have been other recent occasions when the Argentinians, beset by internal troubles, have tried the same type of tactical diversion? Is the Minister aware that on a very recent occasion, of which I have full knowledge, Britain assembled ships which had been stationed in the Caribbean, Gibraltar and the Mediterranean, and stood them about 400 miles off the Falklands in support of HMS "Endurance", and that when this became known, without fuss and publicity, a diplomatic solution followed? While I do not press the Minister on what is happening today, I trust that it is the same sort of action."—*Official Report*, 30 March 1982; Vol. 21, c. 198.]

The House and whole country have the right to say the same thing to the Government. The people of the Falkland Islands have an even greater right to say it than ourselves. The right hon. Lady has not answered that question. She has hardly attempted to answer it. It is no answer to refer the matter so effectively disposed of by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands), who has such knowledge of these matters. It is, of course, a very different question.

No one can say for certain that the pacific and honourable solution of this problem that was reached in 1977 was due to the combination of diplomatic and military activity. These things cannot be proved. There is, however, every likelihood that that was the case. In any event, the fact that it worked on the previous occasion was surely all the more reason for the Government's seeking to make it work on this occasion, especially when, according to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—I refer again to the diplomatic exchanges—it had been going on for some time. According to the diplomatic exchanges, the Argentine Government were still awaiting an answer from the Secretary of State on some of the matters involved.

The right hon. Lady made some play, although not very effectively, with the time it takes to get warships into the area. We are talking about events several weeks ago. All these matters have to be answered. They cannot be answered fully in this debate. There will have to be another debate on the subject next week. Whether that debate takes the form of a motion of censure, or some other form, or perhaps takes the form of the establishment of an inquiry into the whole matter, so that all the evidence and the facts can be laid before the people of this country, I have not the slightest doubt that, at some stage, an inquiry of that nature, without any inhibitions and restraints, that can prove the matter fully will have to be undertaken.

I return to what I said at the start of my remarks. We are paramourly concerned, like, I am sure, the bulk of the House—I am sure that the country is also concerned—about what we can do to protect those who rightly and naturally look to us for protection. So far, they have been betrayed. The responsibility for the betrayal rests with the Government. The Government must now prove by deeds—they will never be able to do it by words—that they are not responsible for the betrayal and cannot be faced with that charge. That is the charge, I believe, that lies against them. Even though the position and the circumstances of the people who live in the Falkland Islands are uppermost in our minds—it would be outrageous if that were not the case—there is the longer-term interest to ensure that foul and brutal aggression does not succeed in our world. If it does, there will be a danger not merely to the Falkland Islands, but to people all over this dangerous planet.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that two hours remain for this debate. I appeal to those Privy Councillors who may be called not to take advantage of the fact that they are being called early because they are Privy Councillors. I ask everyone to bear in mind that almost all hon. Members have indicated that they would like to speak.

12.1 pm

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton): There are times, Mr. Speaker, in the affairs of our nation when the House should speak with a single, united voice. This is just such a time. The Leader of the Opposition spoke for us all. He did this nation a service when, in clear and unmistakable terms, he condemned what he called this brutal aggression and when he affirmed the rights of the Falkland islanders to decide their own destiny. I warmly applaud that part of his speech. I resent and reject his charge of betrayal.

I have a single simple point to make and I can make it shortly. It is right that the House should also, at this moment of crisis for our nation and for the Government, pledge full support to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her colleagues in their heavy and awesome responsibility. As the Leader of the Opposition said, we must do what is necessary and what is right. However, let us see that what we do is well done.

Undoubtedly, there will be questions to be asked. There will also be questions to be answered. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that there will be a need for a full account of this affair. However, some of those questions can and should be listed shortly now.

It is astounding that, for all our defence expenditure, which in absolute and proportional terms is huge, and for all our capacity for diplomatic activity and intelligence, we appear to have been so woefully ill prepared. It is extraordinary that conventional forces were not deployed on standby against an occupation.

The rule should surely be that the defence of our realm begins wherever British people are. Defence of the realm begins wherever they travel on their lawful occasions and wherever they may be threatened. The apparent assumption that the problem could be resolved only by diplomatic means was surely fatuous. However, if we have no inquests as yet, it must surely be said now that this incident demands a revision of the United Kingdom's defence strategy, some aspects of which have made many hon. Members and others outside the House decidedly nervous.

However, let us declare and resolve that our duty now is to repossess our possessions and to rescue our own people. Our right to the Falkland Islands is undoubted. Our sovereignty is unimpeachable. British interest in that part of the world, in my judgment, is substantial. It is substantial in the Falkland Islands, however trivial the figures may appear to be. It is substantial in the sea, which has yet to yield up its treasures. It is also substantial in Antarctica. The British interest would be substantial even if we were discussing the affairs of just one fellow citizen.

We must rally support to our position and cause. I entirely agree with the Leader of the Opposition that this nation has always been prompt to condemn dictatorship, to ally ourselves and fight against it and fight against aggression. Of course, we must explore every diplomatic and legal means to recover what is legitimately ours.

House of Commons

Saturday 3 April 1982

The House met at Eleven o'clock, notice having been given by MR. SPEAKER, pursuant to Standing Order No. 122 (Earlier meeting of the House in certain circumstances).

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Falkland Islands (Personal Statement)

11.5 am

The Lord Privy Seal (Mr. Humphrey Atkins): Following my statement to the House at 11 o'clock yesterday, I said in answer to supplementary questions from the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) and my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn and Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) that we had been in touch with the governor of the Falkland Islands half an hour before I made my statement. That was inaccurate. We had in fact been in touch two hours earlier, at 8.30 am our time. No invasion had then taken place, and when I made my statement I had no knowledge of any change in the situation.

I very much regret that I inadvertently misled the House, and I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to set the record straight and to apologise to the House.

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed.

That, at this day's sitting, Mr. Speaker do adjourn the House at Two o'clock without putting any Question.—[Mr. Jopling.]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Stoddart) gave me notice of a manuscript amendment, which I do not propose to accept. The manuscript amendment proposes that the sitting should continue until 5 o'clock. If the House wishes to vote on the motion, I think that it had better do so straight away to avoid taking time out of the main debate. If the motion were rejected, we would have an open-ended debate.

11.7 am

Mr. David Stoddart (Swindon): I wish to speak briefly to the motion and to give my reasons for asking that the manuscript amendment be accepted.

The motion proposes a three-hour debate. Quite naturally, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and other senior Front Bench spokesmen will wish to put the point of view of the Government and of the Opposition. The House is packed with Privy Councillors, ex-Prime Ministers and ex-Foreign Secretaries who are entitled to give the House the benefit of their long experience. There will therefore be very little time left for Back-Bench Members to give their views and those of their constituents whom they will have consulted yesterday about the grave crisis facing this country and the international terrorism perpetrated on the Falkland Islands by the Argentine Government.

I hope, therefore, that the House will vote against the motion so that we may have an adequate discussion on this matter.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 115.

Division No. 117]

[11.07 am

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon H. (S'thorne)
Atkins, Robert (Preston N)
Atkinson, David (B'm'th, E)
Baker, Kenneth (St. M'bone)
Banks, Robert
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W. (Buckingham)
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter (W'wich W)
Bowden, Andrew
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John (Winchester)
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burden, Sir Frederick
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John (Luton West)
Carlisle, Kenneth (Lincoln)
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. (R'c'n)
Chalker, Mrs. Lynda
Channon, Rt. Hon. Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. (Croydon S)
Clegg, Sir Walter
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Costain, Sir Albert
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Denshow
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert (Dartford)
Durant, Tony
Eden, Rt Hon Sir John
Edwards, Rt Hon N. (P'broke)
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Reginald
Faith, Mrs Sheila
Fell, Sir Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Geoffrey
Fisher, Sir Nigel
Fletcher, A. (Ed'nb'gh N)
Fletcher-Cooke, Sir Charles
Forman, Nigel
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, Peter (South Angus)
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, George (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodhead, Sir Victor
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Anthony (Harrow C)
Greenway, Harry
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Michael (Salisbury)
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hasehurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hayhoe, Barney
Heddle, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
Holland, Philip (Carlton)
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph (Norfolk)
Hunt, David (Wirral)
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kitson, Sir Timothy
Lang, Ian
LeMarchant, Spencer
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim (Beeston)
Lewis, Kenneth (Rutland)
Lloyd, Peter (Fareham)
Loveridge, John
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
Macmillan, Rt Hon M.
McNair-Wilson, M. (N'bury)
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael (Arundel)
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal (B'grove)
Mills, Iain (Meriden)
Mills, Peter (West Devon)
Mitchell, David (Basingstoke)
Moate, Roger
Moore, John
Morris, M. (N'hampden S)
Moyle, Rt Hon Roland
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Normanton, Tom
Nott, Rt Hon John
Onslow, Cranley

Falkland Islands

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Jopling.*]

11.19 am

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): The House meets this Saturday to respond to a situation of great gravity. We are here because, for the first time for many years, British sovereign territory has been invaded by a foreign power. After several days of rising tension in our relations with Argentina, that country's Armed Forces attacked the Falkland Islands yesterday and established military control of the islands.

Yesterday was a day of rumour and counter-rumour. Throughout the day we had no communication from the Government of the Falklands. Indeed, the last message that we received was at 21.55 hours on Thursday night, 1 April. Yesterday morning at 8.33 am we sent a telegram which was acknowledged. At 8.45 am all communications ceased. I shall refer to that again in a moment. By late afternoon yesterday it became clear that an Argentine invasion had taken place and that the lawful British Government of the islands had been usurped.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning totally this unprovoked aggression by the Government of Argentina against British territory. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".] It has not a shred of justification and not a scrap of legality.

It was not until 8.30 this morning, our time, when I was able to speak to the governor, who had arrived in Uruguay, that I learnt precisely what had happened. He told me that the Argentines had landed at approximately 6 am Falkland's time, 10 am our time. One party attacked the capital from the landward side and another from the seaward side. The governor then sent a signal to us which we did not receive.

Communications had ceased at 8.45 am our time. It is common for atmospheric conditions to make communications with Port Stanley difficult. Indeed, we had been out of contact for a period the previous night.

The governor reported that the Marines, in the defence of Government House, were superb. He said that they acted in the best traditions of the Royal Marines. They inflicted casualties, but those defending Government House suffered none. He had kept the local people informed of what was happening through a small local transmitter which he had in Government House. He is relieved that the islanders heeded his advice to stay indoors. Fortunately, as far as he is aware, there were no civilian casualties. When he left the Falklands, he said that the people were in tears. They do not want to be Argentine. He said that the islanders are still tremendously loyal. I must say that I have every confidence in the governor and the action that he took.

I must tell the House that the Falkland Islands and their dependencies remain British territory. No aggression and no invasion can alter that simple fact. It is the Government's objective to see that the islands are freed from occupation and are returned to British administration at the earliest possible moment.

Argentina has, of course, long disputed British sovereignty over the islands. We have absolutely no doubt about our sovereignty, which has been continuous since 1833. Nor have we any doubt about the unequivocal wishes of the Falkland Islanders, who are British in stock

and tradition, and they wish to remain British in allegiance. We cannot allow the democratic rights of the islanders to be denied by the territorial ambitions of Argentina.

Over the past 15 years, successive British Governments have held a series of meetings with the Argentine Government to discuss the dispute. In many of these meetings elected representatives of the islanders have taken part. We have always made it clear that their wishes were paramount and that there would be no change in sovereignty without their consent and without the approval of the House.

The most recent meeting took place this year in New York at the end of February between my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham, (Mr. Luce) accompanied by two members of the islands council, and the Deputy Foreign Secretary of Argentina. The atmosphere at the meeting was cordial and positive, and a communiqué was issued about future negotiating procedures. Unfortunately, the joint communiqué which had been agreed was not published in Buenos Aires.

There was a good deal of bellicose comment in the Argentine press in late February and early March, about which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs expressed his concern in the House on 3 March following the Anglo-Argentine talks in New York. However, this has not been an uncommon situation in Argentina over the years. It would have been absurd to dispatch the fleet every time there was bellicose talk in Buenos Aires. There was no good reason on 3 March to think that an invasion was being planned, especially against the background of the constructive talks on which my hon. Friend had just been engaged. The joint communiqué on behalf of the Argentine deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and my hon. Friend read:

"The meeting took place in a cordial and positive spirit. The two sides reaffirmed their resolve to find a solution to the sovereignty dispute and considered in detail an Argentine proposal for procedures to make better progress in this sense."

There had, of course, been previous incidents affecting sovereignty before the one in South Georgia, to which I shall refer in a moment. In December 1976 the Argentines illegally set up a scientific station on one of the dependencies within the Falklands group—Southern Thule. The Labour Government attempted to solve the matter through diplomatic exchanges, but without success. The Argentines remained there and are still there.

Two weeks ago—on 19 March—the latest in this series of incidents affecting sovereignty occurred; and the deterioration in relations between the British and Argentinian Governments which culminated in yesterday's Argentinian invasion began. The incident appeared at the start to be relatively minor. But we now know it was the beginning of much more.

The commander of the British Antarctic Survey base at Grytviken on South Georgia—a dependency of the Falkland Islands over which the United Kingdom has exercised sovereignty since 1775 when the island was discovered by Captain Cook—reported to us that an Argentine Navy cargo ship had landed about 60 Argentines at nearby Leith harbour. They had set up camp and hoisted the Argentine flag. They were there to carry out a valid commercial contract to remove scrap metal from a former whaling station.

The leader of the commercial expedition, Davidoff, had told our embassy in Buenos Aires that he would be going

[The Prime Minister]

to South Georgia in March. He was reminded of the need to obtain permission from the immigration authorities on the island. He did not do so. The base commander told the Argentines that they had no right to land on South Georgia without the permission of the British authorities. They should go either to Grytviken to get the necessary clearances, or leave. The ship and some 50 of them left on 22 March. Although about 10 Argentines remained behind, this appeared to reduce the tension.

In the meantime, we had been in touch with the Argentine Government about the incident. They claimed to have had no prior knowledge of the landing and assured us that there were no Argentine military personnel in the party. For our part we made it clear that, while we had no wish to interfere in the operation of a normal commercial contract, we could not accept the illegal presence of these people on British territory.

We asked the Argentine Government either to arrange for the departure of the remaining men or to ensure that they obtained the necessary permission to be there. Because we recognised the potentially serious nature of the situation, HMS "Endurance" was ordered to the area. We told the Argentine Government that if they failed to regularise the position of the party on South Georgia or to arrange for their departure HMS "Endurance" would take them off, without using force, and return them to Argentina.

This was, however, to be a last resort. We were determined that this apparently minor problem of 10 people on South Georgia in pursuit of a commercial contract should not be allowed to escalate and we made it plain to the Argentine Government that we wanted to achieve a peaceful resolution of the problem by diplomatic means. To help in this, HMS "Endurance" was ordered not to approach the Argentine party at Leith but to go to Grytviken.

But it soon became clear that the Argentine Government had little interest in trying to solve the problem. On 25 March another Argentine navy ship arrived at Leith to deliver supplies to the 10 men ashore. Our ambassador in Buenos Aires sought an early response from the Argentine Government to our previous requests that they should arrange for the men's departure. This request was refused. Last Sunday, on Sunday 28 March, the Argentine Foreign Minister sent a message to my right hon. and noble Friend the Foreign Secretary refusing outright to regularise the men's position. Instead it restated Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and their dependencies.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary then sent a message to the United States Secretary of State asking him to intervene and to urge restraint.

By the beginning of this week it was clear that our efforts to solve the South Georgia dispute through the usual diplomatic channels were getting nowhere. Therefore, on Wednesday 31 March my right hon. and noble Friend the Foreign Secretary proposed to the Argentine Foreign Minister that we should dispatch a special emissary to Buenos Aires.

Later that day we received information which led us to believe that a large number of Argentine ships, including an aircraft carrier, destroyers, landing craft, troop carriers and submarines were heading for Port Stanley. I contacted

President Reagan that evening and asked him to intervene with the Argentine President directly. We promised, in the meantime, to take no action to escalate the dispute for fear of precipitating—[*Interruption*—]—the very event that our efforts were directed to avoid. May I remind Opposition Members—[*Interruption*—]—what happened when, during the lifetime of their Government—

Mr. J. W. Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): We did not lose the Falklands.

The Prime Minister—Southern Thule was occupied. It was occupied in 1976. The House was not even informed by the then Government until 1978, when, in response to questioning by my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce), now Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands) said:

"We have sought the resolve the issue though diplomatic exchanges between the two Governments. That is infinitely preferable to public denunciations and public statements when we are trying to achieve a practical result to the problem that has arisen."—[*Official Report*, 24 May 1978; Vol. 950, c. 1550-51.]

Mr. Edward Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil): The right hon. Lady is talking about a piece of rock in the most southerly part of the dependencies, which is totally uninhabited and which smells of large accumulations of penguin and other bird droppings. There is a vast difference—a whole world of difference—between the 1,800 people now imprisoned by Argentine invaders and that argument. The right hon. Lady should have the grace to accept that.

The Prime Minister: We are talking about the sovereignty of British territory—[*Interruption*—]—which was infringed in 1976. The House was not even informed of it until 1978. We are talking about a further incident in South Georgia which—as I have indicated—seemed to be a minor incident at the time. There is only a British Antarctic scientific survey there and there was a commercial contract to remove a whaling station. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that had I come to the House at that time and said that we had a problem on South Georgia with 10 people who had landed with a contract to remove a whaling station, and had I gone on to say that we should send HMS "Invincible", I should have been accused of war mongering and sabre rattling.

Information about the Argentine fleet did not arrive until Wednesday. Argentina is, of course, very close to the Falklands—a point that the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil cannot and must not ignore—and its Navy can sail there very quickly. On Thursday, the Argentine Foreign Minister rejected the idea of an emissary and told our ambassador that the diplomatic channel, as a means of solving this dispute, was closed. President Reagan had a very long telephone conversation, of some 50 minutes, with the Argentine President, but his strong representations fell on deaf ears. I am grateful to him and to Secretary Haig for their strenuous and persistent efforts on our behalf.

On Thursday, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Perez De Cuellar, summoned both British and Argentine permanent representatives to urge both countries to refrain from the use or threat of force in the South Atlantic. Later that evening we sought an emergency meeting of the Security Council. We accepted the appeal of its President for restraint. The Argentines

said nothing. On Friday, as the House knows, the Argentines invaded the Falklands and I have given a precise account of everything we knew, or did not know about that situation. There were also reports that yesterday the Argentines also attacked South Georgia, where HMS "Endurance" had left a detachment of 22 Royal Marines. Our information is that on 2 April an Argentine naval transport vessel informed the base commander at Grytviken that an important message would be passed to him after 11 o'clock today our time. It is assumed that this message will ask the base commander to surrender.

Before indicating some of the measures that the Government have taken in response to the Argentinian invasion, I should like to make three points. First, even if ships had been instructed to sail the day that the Argentines landed on South Georgia to clear the whaling station, the ships could not possibly have got to Port Stanley before the invasion. [Interruption.] Opposition Members may not like it, but that is a fact.

Secondly, there have been several occasions in the past when an invasion has been threatened. The only way of being certain to prevent an invasion would have been to keep a very large fleet close to the Falklands, when we are some 8,000 miles away from base. No Government have ever been able to do that, and the cost would be enormous.

Mr. Eric Ogden (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the right hon. Lady say what has happened to HMS "Endurance"?

The Prime Minister: HMS "Endurance" is in the area. It is not for me to say precisely where, and the hon. Gentleman would not wish me to do so.

Thirdly, aircraft unable to land on the Falklands, because of the frequently changing weather, would have had little fuel left and, ironically, their only hope of landing safely would have been to divert to Argentina. Indeed, all of the air and most sea supplies for the Falklands come from Argentina, which is but 400 miles away compared with our 8,000 miles.

That is the background against which we have to make decisions and to consider what action we can best take. I cannot tell the House precisely what dispositions have been made—some ships are already at sea, others were put on immediate alert on Thursday evening.

The Government have now decided that a large task force will sail as soon as all preparations are complete. HMS "Invisible" will be in the lead and will leave port on Monday.

I stress that I cannot foretell what orders the task force will receive as it proceeds. That will depend on the situation at the time. Meanwhile, we hope that our continuing diplomatic efforts, helped by our many friends, will meet with success.

The Foreign Ministers of the European Community member States yesterday condemned the intervention and urged withdrawal. The NATO Council called on both sides to refrain from force and continue diplomacy.

The United Nations Security Council met again yesterday and will continue its discussions today. [Laughter.] Opposition Members laugh. They would have been the first to urge a meeting of the Security Council if we had not called one. They would have been the first to urge restraint and to urge a solution to the problem by diplomatic means. They would have been the first to accuse us of sabre rattling and war mongering.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (West Lothian): The right hon. Lady referred to our many friends. Have we any friends in South America on this issue?

The Prime Minister: Doubtless our friends in South America will make their views known during any proceedings at the Security Council. I believe that many countries in South America will be prepared to condemn the invasion of the Falklands Islands by force.

We are now reviewing all aspects of the relationship between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The Argentine charge d'affaires and his staff were yesterday instructed to leave within four days.

As an appropriate precautionary and, I hope, temporary measure, the Government have taken action to freeze Argentine financial assets held in this country. An order will be laid before Parliament today under the Emergency Laws (Re-enactments and Repeals) Act 1964 blocking the movement of gold, securities or funds held in the United Kingdom by the Argentine Government or Argentine residents.

As a further precautionary measure, the ECGD has suspended new export credit cover for the Argentine. It is the Government's earnest wish that a return to good sense and the normal rules of international behaviour on the part of the Argentine Government will obviate the necessity for action across the full range of economic relations.

We shall be reviewing the situation and be ready to take further steps that we deem appropriate and we shall, of course, report to the House.

The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. They are few in number, but they have the right to live in peace, to choose their own way of life and to determine their own allegiance. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. It is the wish of the British people and the duty of Her Majesty's Government to do everything that we can to uphold that right. That will be our hope and our endeavour and, I believe, the resolve of every Member of the House.

11.45 am

Mr. Michael Foot (Ebbw. Vale): It was obviously essential that the House of Commons should be recalled on this occasion. I thank the Prime Minister for the decision to do so. I can well understand the anxiety and impatience of many of my hon. Friends on the Back Benches who voted in the Division a few minutes ago, and who desire to have full and proper time to examine all the aspects of this issue. I shall return to that aspect of the matter in a few minutes.

I first wish to set on record as clearly as I possibly can what we believe to be the international rights and wrongs of this matter, because I believe that one of the purposes of the House being assembled on this occasion is to make that clear not only to the people in our country but to people throughout the world.

The rights and the circumstances of the people in the Falkland Islands must be uppermost in our minds. There is no question in the Falkland Islands of any colonial dependence or anything of the sort. It is a question of people who wish to be associated with this country and who have built their whole lives on the basis of association with this country. We have a moral duty, a political duty and every other kind of duty to ensure that that is sustained.

The people of the Falkland Islands have the absolute right to look to us at this moment of their desperate plight, just as they have looked to us over the past 150 years. They are faced with an act of naked, unqualified aggression, carried out in the most shameful and disreputable circumstances. Any guarantee from this invading force is utterly worthless—as worthless as any of the guarantees that are given by this same Argentine junta to its own people.

We can hardly forget that thousands of innocent people fighting for their political rights in Argentine are in prison and have been tortured and debased. We cannot forget that fact when our friends and fellow citizens in the Falkland Islands are suffering as they are at this moment.

On the merits of the matter, we hope that the question is understood throughout the world. In that respect I believe that the Government were right to take the matter to the United Nations. It would have been delinquency if they had not, because that is the forum in which, we have agreed that such matters of international right and international claim should be stated.

Whatever else the Government have done—I shall come to that in a moment—or not done, I believe that it was essential for them to take our case to the United Nations and to present it with all the force and power of advocacy at the command of this country. The decision and the vote in the United Nations will take place in an hour or two's time. I must say to people there that we in this country, as a whole, irrespective of our party affiliations, will examine the votes most carefully.

I was interested to hear how strongly the President of France spoke out earlier this morning. I hope that every other country in the world will speak in a similar way.

If, at the United Nations this afternoon, no such declaration were made—I know that it would be only a declaration at first, but there might be the possibility of action there later—not merely would it be a gross injury to the rights of the people of the Falkland Islands, not merely would it be an injury to the people of this country, who have a right to have their claims upheld in the United Nations, but it would be a serious injury to the United Nations itself. It would enhance the dangers that similar, unprovoked aggressions could occur in other parts of the world.

That is one of the reasons why we are determined to ensure that we examine this matter in full and uphold the rights of our country throughout the world, and the claim of our country to be a defender of people's freedom throughout the world, particularly those who look to us for special protection, as do the people in the Falkland Islands.

I deal next with the Government's conduct in the matter. What has happened to British diplomacy? The explanations given by the right hon. Lady, when she managed to rise above some of her own party arguments—they were not quite the exclusive part of her speech—were not very full and not very clear. They will need to be made a good deal more ample in the days to come.

The right hon. Lady did not quote fully the response of Lord Carrington, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, at his press conference yesterday. She referred to the Minister of State, who, according to Lord Carrington,

"had just been in New York discussing with Mr. Ross, his opposite number, the question of resumption of talks with the

Argentine Government about the problems of the Falkland Islands. And they had had a talk and come to an agreement. Mr. Ross went back to the Argentine and a number of things came up and they sent a message which"

I emphasise the words—

"I have not yet had time to reply to."

Lord Carrington added:

"So there was every reason to suppose that the Argentines were interested in negotiations."

Those talks took place on 27 February. The right hon. Lady gave an account of these negotiations. But from what has happened it seems that the British Government have been fooled by the way in which the Argentine junta has gone about its business. The Government must answer for that as well as for everything else.

What about British communications and British intelligence? *The Guardian* states today in a leading article:

"This country devotes a greater proportion of its annual output to its armed forces than any other Western country, with the exception of the United States. It has extensive diplomatic and intelligence gathering activities. And all of that gave Mrs. Thatcher, Lord Carrington and Mr. Note precisely no effective cards when the Argentine navy moved."

I should be very surprised to hear, because of some of the previous debates and discussions on the crises that have arisen with the Argentine, that the British Government did not have better intelligence than that. So good was our intelligence that although the Prime Minister now tells us that the invasion took place at 10 am yesterday, the Lord Privy Seal—I know that he has apologised for some of his remarks—told the House of Commons and the British people:

"We are taking appropriate military and diplomatic measures to sustain our rights under international law and in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations charter."—[*Official Report*, 2 April 1982; Vol. 21, c. 571.]

When he was saying that, it was the Argentine Government who were taking appropriate military, not diplomatic, measures to enforce their will.

The right hon. Lady, the Secretary of State for Defence and the whole Government will have to give a very full account of what happened, how their diplomacy was conducted and why we did not have the information to which we are entitled when expenditure takes place on such a scale. Above all, more important than the question of what happened to British diplomacy or to British intelligence, is what happened to our power to act. The right hon. Lady seemed to dismiss that question. It cannot be dismissed. Of course this country has the power to act—short, often, of taking military measures. Indeed, we have always been told, as I understand it, that the purpose of having some military power is to deter. The right to deter and the capacity to deter were both required in this situation.

The previous Government had to deal with the same kind of dictatorial regime in the Argentine, the same kind of threat to the people of the Falkland Islands, and the same kinds of problems as those with which the Government have had to wrestle over the past weeks and months. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South-East (Mr. Callaghan) compressed the whole position into the question that he put to the Government only last Tuesday. I shall read his remarks to the House, and I ask the House to mark every word. This was no factious Opposition. This was an Opposition Member seeking to sustain the Government if the Government were doing their duty.

My right hon. Friend said:

"I support the Government's attempts to solve the problem by diplomatic means, which is clearly the best and most sensible way of approaching the problem, but is the Minister aware that there have been other recent occasions when the Argentinians, when beset by internal troubles, have tried the same type of tactical diversion? Is the Minister aware that on a very recent occasion, of which I have full knowledge, Britain assembled ships which had been stationed in the Caribbean, Gibraltar and in the Mediterranean, and stood them about 400 miles off the Falklands in support of HMS "Endurance", and that when this fact became known, without fuss and publicity, a diplomatic solution followed? While I do not press the Minister on what is happening today, I trust that it is the same sort of action."—*[Official Report, 30 March 1982; Vol. 21, c. 198.]*

The House and whole country have the right to say the same thing to the Government. The people of the Falkland Islands have an even greater right to say it than ourselves. The right hon. Lady has not answered that question. She has hardly attempted to answer it. It is no answer to refer to the matter so effectively disposed of by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands), who has much knowledge of these matters. It is, of course, a very different question.

No one can say for certain that the pacific and honourable solution of this problem that was reached in 1977 was due to the combination of diplomatic and military activity. These things cannot be proved. There is, however, every likelihood that that was the case. In any event, the fact that it worked on the previous occasion was surely all the more reason for the Government's seeking to make it work on this occasion, especially when, according to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—I refer again to the diplomatic exchanges—it had been going on for some time. According to the diplomatic exchanges, the Argentine Government were still awaiting an answer from the Secretary of State on some of the matters involved.

The right hon. Lady made some play, although not very effectively, with the time it takes to get warships into the area. We are talking about events several weeks ago. All these matters have to be answered. They cannot be answered fully in this debate. There will have to be another debate on the subject next week. Whether that debate takes the form of a motion of censure, or some other form, or perhaps takes the form of the establishment of an inquiry into the whole matter, so that all the evidence and the facts can be laid before the people of this country, I have not the slightest doubt that, at some stage, an inquiry of that nature, without any inhibitions and restraints, that can probe the matter fully will have to be undertaken.

I return to what I said at the start of my remarks. We are paragonously concerned, like, I am sure, the bulk of the House—I am sure that the country is also concerned—about what we can do to protect those who rightly and naturally look to us for protection. So far, they have been betrayed. The responsibility for the betrayal rests with the Government. The Government must now prove by deeds—they will never be able to do it by words—that they are not responsible for the betrayal and cannot be faced with that charge. That is the charge, I believe, that lies against them. Even though the position and the circumstances of the people who live in the Falkland Islands are uppermost in our minds—it would be outrageous if that were not the case—there is the longer-term interest to ensure that foul and brutal aggression does not succeed in our world. If it does, there will be a danger not merely to the Falkland Islands, but to people all over this dangerous planet.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that two hours remain for this debate. I appeal to those Privy Councillors who may be called not to take advantage of the fact that they are being called early because they are Privy Councillors. I ask everyone to bear in mind that almost all hon. Members have indicated that they would like to speak.

12.1 pm

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton): There are times, Mr. Speaker, in the affairs of our nation when the House should speak with a single, united voice. This is just such a time. The Leader of the Opposition spoke for us all. He did this nation a service when, in clear and unmistakable terms, he condemned what he called this brutal aggression and when he affirmed the rights of the Falkland islanders to decide their own destiny. I warmly applaud that part of his speech. I resent and reject his charge of betrayal.

I have a single simple point to make and I can make it shortly. It is right that the House should also, at this moment of crisis for our nation and for the Government, pledge full support to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her colleagues in their heavy and awesome responsibility. As the Leader of the Opposition said, we must do what is necessary and what is right. However, let us see that what we do is well done.

Undoubtedly, there will be questions to be asked. There will also be questions to be answered. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that there will be a need for a full account of this affair. However, some of those questions can and should be listed shortly now.

It is astounding that, for all our defence expenditure, which in absolute and proportional terms is huge, and for all our capacity for diplomatic activity and intelligence, we appear to have been so woefully ill prepared. It is extraordinary that conventional forces were not deployed on standby against an occupation.

The rule should surely be that the defence of our realm begins wherever British people are. Defence of the realm begins wherever they travel on their lawful occasions and wherever they may be threatened. The apparent assumption that the problem could be resolved only by diplomatic means was surely fatuous. However, if we have no inequities as yet, it must surely be said now that this incident demands a revision of the United Kingdom's defence strategy, some aspects of which have made many hon. Members and others outside the House decidedly nervous.

However, let us declare and resolve that our duty now is to repossess our possessions and to rescue our own people. Our right to the Falkland Islands is undoubted. Our sovereignty is unimpeachable. British interest in that part of the world, in my judgment, is substantial. It is substantial in the Falkland Islands, however trivial the figures may appear to be. It is substantial in the sea, which has yet to yield up its treasures. It is also substantial in Antarctica. The British interest would be substantial even if we were discussing the affairs of just one fellow citizen.

We must rally support to our position and cause. I entirely agree with the Leader of the Opposition that this nation has always been prompt to condemn dictatorship, to ally ourselves and fight against it and fight against aggression. Of course, we must explore every diplomatic and legal means to recover what is legitimately ours.

[Mr. Edward du Cann]

Every day now is crucial, for every day that the fait accompli is accepted, the harder it will be to remove it: ask the peoples of Afghanistan, Hungary or Poland about that.

The world must face the fact that if one tolerates a single act of aggression, one connives at them all. In the United Kingdom, we must accept reality. For all our alliances and for all the social politenesses which the diplomats so often mistake for trust, in the end in life it is self-reliance and only self-reliance that counts. Suez, when I first came into the House 25 and more years ago, surely taught us that not every ally is staunch when the call comes. We have one duty only, which we owe to ourselves—the duty to rescue our people and to uphold our rights. Let that be the unanimous and clear resolve of the House this day.

Let us hear no more about logistics—how difficult it is to travel long distances. I do not remember the Duke of Wellington whining about Torres Vedras. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We have nothing to lose now except our honour. I am clear that that is safe in the hands of my right hon. Friend.

12.7 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South): I want to preface the few things I wish to say to the House with an appeal which I direct particularly and personally to the Prime Minister. It would be grotesque, at a time when, in circumstances of crisis, we are deliberating about the protection of a remote portion of British territory and of the British people, that we should at the same time be engaged in following up proposals which those in a part of the United Kingdom believe—the right hon. Lady is aware of the reasons why they believe—are designed eventually to detach them from being part of the United Kingdom. I assume that she will have already given instructions—if she has not, I appeal to her to do so—that the proposals which were to have been produced on Monday will be deferred until a more timely occasion.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) that the House today is not primarily concerned with inquests—there will be a time for inquests and more abundant material for them—but with what is now to be done. Those who take part in this debate ought to declare clearly what they believe ought now to be done.

Nevertheless, there is a matter of the immediate past where our answer will cast light on what we intend to do and what our spirit is. The Secretary of State for Defence was asked yesterday "if the British Marines had been given orders to surrender if outnumbered".

He is reported as having said "Of course not". "He insisted that 'no British soldier ever surrenders.'" Whatever other inquiries there are, there has to be a court martial and an inquiry to establish the circumstances in which what the Secretary of State for Defence evidently regarded as right and expected did not happen, with consequent infamy to this country.

The Leader of the Opposition was undoubtedly—

Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lonsdale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On a matter of this sensitivity, the record should be put straight. Was not the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell) relying on a quotation from a newspaper?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The right hon. Gentleman must be allowed to continue.

Mr. Powell: I agree with everything that the Leader of the Opposition said with regard to the Government's application to the United Nations. It was clearly right that we should place this matter, as we are in duty bound to do, before that forum; but when the sovereign territory of a country is invaded without warning, without provocation and without excuse, there is nothing which requires us to wait upon the decisions or upon the condition or upon the deliberations or upon the resolutions of the United Nations before we take the appropriate steps which ought to follow.

It is an ironical coincidence that the name of one of the ships which may be involved, the "Invincible", was also the name of the capital ship of which the dispatch from home waters to the Falkland Islands in December 1914 resulted in the destruction of Von Spee's squadron. On that occasion the German admiral, when he came up within sight of Port Stanley, made a mistake which proved fatal to him and to his sailors. Instead of closing with the enemy he stood off.

There is only one reaction which if fit to meet unprovoked aggression upon one's own sovereign territory; that is direct and unqualified and immediate willingness—not merely willingness, but willingness expressed by action—to use force. The Government have set in train measures which will enable them to do that; but there must be nothing which casts doubt upon their will and their intention to do it.

A few days ago I put a question to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with regard to opinion in this country. I asked him whether it was "the Government's view that public opinion in this country would support, if necessary, the use of force to maintain British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and the dependencies."

The hon. Gentleman explained to me afterwards that he had clearly heard the first part of my question, but he did not reply to it:

"I should firmly point out that we claim and have sovereignty over the area and there is no shadow of doubt that, if it comes to the point, it will be our duty to defend and support the islanders to the best of our ability."—[Official Report, 30 March 1982; Vol. 88, c. 165.]

The Government have failed to do that duty. They have manifestly failed. They have failed in the face of the world.

The Prime Minister, shortly after she came into office, received a soubriquet as the "Iron Lady". It arose in the context of remarks which she made about defence against the Soviet Union and its allies; but there was no reason to suppose that the right hon. Lady did not welcome and, indeed, take pride in that description. In the next week or two this House, the nation and the right hon. Lady herself will learn of what metal she is made.

12.14 pm

Sir Nigel Fisher (Surbiton): Hitherto, Britain's policy for the Falkland Islands has been genuinely bipartisan. Neither side of the House has ever made any attempt, in the long drawn out negotiations with the Argentine to make party political capital. We have all been united in our support of the Falkland Islands, but I must honestly say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they cannot have expected a bipartisan reaction from the

Opposition today. Indeed, Ministers will not escape criticism from Conservative Members as well as from Opposition Members.

Wherever the blame may lie, no one can deny that the islanders have been let down and that Britain has been humiliated. What can now be done? One's natural instinct is to get the invaders out, but it is much easier said than done. Logistically it would be very difficult and it would take a considerable time—I understand about two weeks—but far more serious would be the consequence for the islanders themselves.

A full-scale battle for the Falkland Islands would mean that the islanders, including women and children, would be caught in the crossfire and many of them killed. We could avoid that by leaving the Argentine land forces in possession and confining our retaliation to a battle at sea. But then what? We could not keep our warships in the area indefinitely, with no base from which to supply them.

The truth is that we have been pre-empted, as we were in Norway by the Germans in 1940, and that led to the fall of Mr. Chamberlain's Government. Of course, I do not suggest that the same situation should apply today—*[Interruption.]*—but we are entitled to a full explanation of these events and, as soon as security considerations permit, to a clear indication from Ministers as to what action is now proposed.

As a first step, all available sanctions against the Argentine should, of course, be taken. For example, I understand that the people of the Argentine are great football enthusiasts. The very least we should do is to ensure the exclusion of the Argentine from the World Cup. *[Interruption.]* I am not, of course, suggesting that that would induce the Argentine to withdraw from the islands, but the Argentine should be made aware of world condemnation of its unprovoked aggression in every way open to us, just as we did after the invasion of Afghanistan with regard to our athletes going to Moscow.

Whatever action is decided upon, this is a deeply depressing and distressing episode. We have failed—and failed lamentably—to defend the integrity of one of Britain's few remaining colonies. It is difficult to understand why Ministers apparently did not understand the gravity of the threat to the islands. Therefore, I must ask one question. I appreciate that sending a task force of the size required in this instance is a very expensive operation. However, I hope that the fact that no task force was sent in time was not due to economic considerations. I must ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who will reply to the debate, to assure the House that that was not the reason for his lack of action. Will he specifically say that any intelligence indicators and threat assessments about early preparation, either overt or covert, were not disregarded by the Government for political or economic reasons? If our intelligence from the Argentine was as good as it should and used to be, we should have done some contingency planning and had ships and men there in good time to resist the Argentine landing. It is always much easier to stop something happening than to rectify it when it has happened.

The Government can be excused only if our intelligence was very bad and if we genuinely did not know that an invasion was a possibility. That would be some sort of excuse, but not a very good one. Either way, we have been humiliated. Ministers have much to answer for today to the House, to the country and to the loyal people of the Falkland Islands.

12.21 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The Government have the right to ask both sides of the House for the fullest support in their resolve to return the Falkland Islands and the freedom of the islanders to British sovereignty. They will get that support and they deserve it in every action that they take in the Security Council and elsewhere. However, the Government must restore the confidence of the country and the House in their ability to carry out that mission.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that this is not the time to have an examination. There will come a time when an inquiry will be necessary and we must examine in great detail all that has happened or not happened during the past six weeks. However, it is necessary to examine a central question: why was no preparatory action taken a month ago? It cannot be said that this is a question of intelligence. Our own newspapers were carrying major stories. On 25 February *The Guardian* carried a story entitled:

"Falklands raid hint by Argentine army."
On 5 March there was the headline in "The Times"
"Argentina steps up Falklands pressure".

There was ample warning that the position was deteriorating. We knew of the horror of the military junta in the Argentine and we knew of its actions. Only a few days ago, 3,000 political prisoners were taken, only to be released amid the euphoria of the invasion of the Falkland Islands. We knew that the military were jockeying for position in the Navy, the Army and the Air Force. We have known that for many years. It was for that reason four years ago, when a similar position developed, that naval forces were sent.

The Secretary of State for Defence, in his press conference with the Foreign Secretary yesterday said:

"If we had made an earlier move to prepare the task force we would have precipitated, quite possibly, a military response—the very kind of thing by the Argentinians that we tried to avoid." The question that the Foreign Secretary, more than the Secretary of State for Defence, must answer is why no action was taken. On the precedent of the past, it was possible to deploy a naval force and to bring it back without any publicity. It was possible to use it in negotiations with the Argentines, knowing full well that we had behind us a naval force and the capacity to stop an invasion.

I say to the Prime Minister—the Leader of the Opposition fairly mentioned this fact—that the Prime Minister of the day took complete control of that issue. On my recommendation, the Secretary of State for Defence deployed the forces, but that small Cabinet meeting discussed the rules of engagement and the possibility of having to intervene were a naval force to come on to the Falkland Islands. That is the reality that the Prime Minister must now face.

Enough of the past. This is not a moment for censure. The reality is that our naval forces will set sail, which I support. I say to the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell) that I am sure that the Royal Marines conducted themselves in the Falkland Islands in the best spirit of the Royal Marines.

The question that we must now ask is how we can restore confidence. There have been rumours in the newspapers that the Secretary of State for Defence tendered his resignation, only for it to be refused. I would have expected no less of him, because he is a man of

[Dr. David Owen]

honour. Ministers must now consider their position and the quality and strength of the Government during the next few critical weeks.

Absent from the debate have been any positive suggestions. The Prime Minister is entitled to know where the House hopes she will now guide the country. There is much to be said for declaring our right to a 200-mile limit round the Falkland Islands. It would be perfectly compatible with international law to declare that no Argentine vessel should appear within that limit and that, if it did, the British Navy would take action.

The precedent for the use of peaceful military action is the Cuban missile crisis and the use of a naval blockade. We still have a very strong Navy, but only just. We have the capacity to put a naval blockade on that 200-mile limit and to enforce it as long as we have hunter-killer submarines there. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence can breach one aspect of security and let us know that there is a hunter-killer submarine in the area. If not, the House and the Argentines should assume that it is very nearly there. The hunter-killer submarine could effectively take action, if necessary. The Argentine Government should have fair warning to remove their vessels from the area. It is necessary to back up our diplomacy with the resolution and the capacity to deploy our forces.

We all know that there will be great difficulties in a resisted offence against the Falkland Islands. There are massive forces on the islands, but nothing said in the House should exclude any possibility of repossessing them. I believe that they will be repossessed by a combination of firm diplomacy backed by the use of the Navy. They are far away and there are logistic difficulties, but we should not make too much of those. Perhaps we can call on some of our Commonwealth friends in New Zealand and Australia to help us—at least with refuelling.

The Prime Minister misjudged the atmosphere of the House most seriously. It is now necessary for the message to come from the House that we are grossly dissatisfied with the conduct of the Government during the past month. We shall sustain them despite that, because we recognise that our service men's lives might be put at risk.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Owen: No. There is no question of anyone in the House weakening the stance of the Government, but the Prime Minister must now examine ways of restoring the Government's authority and ask herself why Britain has been placed in such a humiliating position during the past few days.

Mr. Dalyell rose—

Dr. Owen: The right hon. Lady said that it would have been absurd to send forces, but I do not agree. It would have been the right decision a month ago. The absence of that decision has meant humiliation. The House must now resolve to sustain the Government in restoring the position.

12.29 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): The third naval power in the world, and the second in NATO, has suffered a humiliating defeat. It is always painful in a state of war to criticise a Government, particularly a

Government of one's own friends, but the purpose of reconfirmation at a time like this is to prevent the repetition of error.

On television yesterday my noble Friend the Foreign Secretary said that diplomacy was the only instrument that the Government had to hand. I fear that my noble Friend on this occasion, as on others, confuses diplomacy with foreign policy. Diplomacy is the day-to-day handling of conferences and international relations. Foreign policy involves having a clear aim and making sure that one has the means to carry out that aim.

We supposed, and we were told, that the aim was to maintain British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, but I am bound to say, having followed the earlier negotiations of my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), and having had some experience of the Foreign Office's views about the Falkland Islands, that that aim was pursued with singularly little conviction. As for the means, they were non-existent. After the withdrawal from Simonstown, we no longer had a fleet almost permanently in the South Atlantic, but no attempt was made to carry out the main recommendation of the Shackleton committee to enlarge the airfield so that, when weather conditions allowed, we could have reinforced the Falkland Islands with a big enough garrison in a time of crisis.

Beyond that, a number of us have been pleading over the years that our defence forces should not only be tailored to the NATO requirements but should be prepared and strong enough to defend our interests outside the specifically NATO area. That advice was not heeded by the Government. Quite the contrary. They proposed to cut back the Navy and, more particularly, HMS "Endurance" and HMS "Invincible". These, ironically, are now two of the ships that are most mentioned in plans for the forthcoming operations. We were told that the cuts were inevitable because of cost. I can only say to the Government that the consequences of our defeat yesterday will be a good deal more expensive than would have been the cost of maintaining those ships.

At the same press conference, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said that no amount of intelligence could have guided the Government to a different course. I do not understand that. It was in February, well within sailing time to the islands, that the Argentine Government first began to speak in a tone which all of us who know anything about the Falkland Islands detected as quite unusually aggressive. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that even if we had begun to send ships from the time of the landing in South Georgia, they would not be there yet. That is quite true, but they would be halfway there. That would be something. I find it hard to understand, unless our intelligence services have been wholly undermined, how they could have failed to detect the extensive preparations that must have been necessary in the Argentine.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done her best to serve as an air-raid shelter for her colleagues directly responsible, and that she has done with her customary loyalty. However, we should recognise that we have suffered the inevitable consequences of the combination of unpreparedness and feeble counsels.

We have lost a battle, but have not lost the war. It is the old saying that Britain always wins the last battle. It will not be an easy task. It is not just that the sea voyage for our ships is long, but that the international waters will

become rougher as the days go by. Pressures will be exerted. We shall be told "Why not try for a reasonable compromise?" and "On no account use force". We already see that in the *Daily Mirror* and *The Guardian* this morning. Or we shall be told to think about our economic interests in the Argentine. All those things will be said.

I do not want to propose a strategy today. This is not the occasion for an armchair strategy. However, I seek from the Government today—and if not today, certainly in the debate that the Leader of the Opposition says he will demand next week—two simple assurances. The first is that we are determined to make the Argentine dictator disgorge what he has taken—by diplomacy if possible, by force if necessary. The second is an undertaking that between now and the publication of the annual defence review the Government will re-examine carefully and closely the plans that they already have in mind; that they will undertake to maintain not only HMS "Endurance" and HMS "Invincible", but make sure that, in all three Services, we have a capability of looking after our interests outside the NATO area as well as within it. Nothing else will restore the credibility of the Government or wipe the stain from Britain's honour.

12.36 pm

Mr. Edward Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil): I wish to put some basic and serious questions to the Government, but first I want to say that our thoughts and prayers at this time must be with the islanders. Most of us who have been to the Falkland Islands, and those who have been involved in the issue over many years, have built up a host of friendships, ties and acquaintanceships. I have a goddaughter who lives in Port Stanley with her mother, Valerie Clarke. We know also Adrian Monck and Willy Bowles, whom many hon. Members have met. The idea that they are in the hands of Argentine Marines should offend us all.

There should be no petty party arguments about Southern Thule. This is a far greater and more serious issue. Indeed, the Prime Minister fell far short of the occasion. If the right hon. Lady meets the islanders, which I hope she will do—and I hope that we shall succeed in freeing them—she will find that they are passionate believers in parliamentary democracy. They listen to and watch everything that we say and do in the House. It is one of their most remarkable characteristics. Even the most obscure written parliamentary question is followed and debated in the Falkland Islands.

How will the islanders hear about this debate today? How will they find out the message that will come from the House? What arrangements will the Government make to ensure that they hear what the House says about their present plight? That is desperately important, because it brings home to us the terrible tragedy that has engulfed them in the last 48 hours.

Having been involved in a handful of crises and incidents during four and a half years of negotiations with the Falkland Islands and with the Argentine Government, I can say that I try to follow these affairs closely. In view of the bipartisan spirit that generally prevails when we handle these issues, I deeply regret saying that I have failed to understand completely the Government's handling of the crisis over the past six to eight weeks. I profoundly reject the suggestion made by the Prime

Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence that we could not have foreseen what was happening.

Anyone who has dealt with these issues over the years will know that there are a number of tell-tale signs. Apparently the negotiations in New York with the Deputy Foreign Minister were cordial and constructive. However, two days later, in the official Argentine press, the military authorities issued a completely different view and line about the negotiations. Surely that was one of the most important tell-tale signs. That was the time to wake up and worry. That happened in February. There were tell-tale signs in February of a major potential hazard. In my view, it was reprehensible not to cover that position by political and military action.

Secondly, I have great difficulty in understanding how the intelligence failed. Our intelligence in Argentina was extremely good. That is why we took action in 1977. We found out that certain attitudes and approaches were being formed. I cannot believe that the quality of our intelligence has changed. Last night the Secretary of State for Defence asked "How can we read the mind of the enemy?" I shall make a disclosure. As well as trying to read the mind of the enemy, we have been reading its telegrams for many years. I am sure that many sources are available to the Government, and I do not understand how they failed to anticipate some of the dangers that suddenly loomed on the horizon.

I shall pose a difficult question for the Secretary of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"]—or the Prime Minister.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a great discourtesy to the House for the Secretary of State for Defence in a debate such as this to absent himself from the House for a very long time?

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

Mr. Rowlands: The United States is very close to the Argentine regime. Bearing in mind the reports in diplomatic circles and those that appeared in the newspapers last week, did the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence receive advice or suggestions from the Americans that there would be a growing problem with the Argentinian regime? I should be surprised to learn that there was not some information or evidence picked up by other authorities apart from our own. That is why I cannot understand what has happened in the past few days. I cannot condone or support the Government if they received any notification or warning signals that subsequently they refused to heed.

I shall refer to the action that was taken in 1977 because in some ways it underlines the indictment that I make of the Government's handling of the crisis, which has led to the imprisonment of 1,850 British citizens on the Falkland Islands. We deployed forces in 1977 because we discovered that there were to be major problems in the negotiations. At that time I was an inexperienced Minister and therefore I approached the then Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South-East (Mr. Callaghan), and put to him the thought that perhaps has been in the minds of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary over the past 24 hours. I put it to my right hon. Friend that the deployment of force could be an over-reaction which would lead to a reaction, which would

[Mr. Rowlands]

trigger a host of uncontrollable events. This seems to have been the state of mind that has prevailed within the Government over the past week or two.

My right hon. Friend asked me "Can you guarantee or assure me that there will not be a threatened invasion and that you will be able to keep the talks going?". I replied "No, Prime Minister, I cannot guarantee that". My right hon. Friend responded by saying "Let me remind you of an old truth: it is better to be safe than sorry". I believe passionately that the Government would have been better safe than sorry.

High office brings privileges and responsibilities. It brings the responsibility of making crucial judgments and decisions, which has fallen upon the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence over the past week or two. I am not a natural opponent of the Foreign Secretary. I have admired his handiwork in Zimbabwe and in other areas. However, he and the Secretary of State for Defence made a massive misjudgment over the past three or four weeks.

What should the House say to the Government? First, it should remind the Government that successive Governments and successive Parliaments have upheld the principle that the wishes, interests, rights, security and safety of the Falkland Islanders are paramount. Secondly, we should charge both the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary to proceed as speedily as possible to restore to the Falkland Islanders their rights, safety and security as urgently as possible. However, if they cannot, and if it turns out that as a result of their massive misjudgment over the past few days they have failed the islanders and Parliament, they should go. The islanders have already paid a high price for the initial set of blunders. They have lost their freedom for the first time for 150 years. The guilty men should not go scot free if we do not retrieve the islands as quickly as possible.

12.47 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should go forth from this debate strengthened, reassured and grateful. She has heard from both sides of the House a unanimous sentiment and a united voice.

I have never been more impressed by the eloquence and oratory of the Leader of the Opposition than I was today. For once he truly spoke for Britain, and so, too, did the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). They were constructive, statesmanlike, sensible speeches. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister realises that she will have the fortification that a previous Conservative Prime Minister at a time of grave international crisis did not have. If she feels that it is necessary, and if it becomes necessary, to use force, it will be used with the united and unanimous backing of the House of Commons, every Member of which looks upon the 1,850 Falkland Islanders as he or she looks upon his or her constituents. In a sense, that is what they are, and we must do something to protect and preserve them.

But what a blunder, what a monumental folly, that the Falkland Islanders should be incarcerated in an Argentine gaol. That is what it amounts to. It is always better to anticipate than to react. It is always easier to anticipate than to react. The great blunder—we shall all want

dated explanations—was that the Government failed to anticipate, and they will now have the greatest difficulty in knowing how to react.

The right hon. Member for Devonport made some sensible, constructive and workable suggestions but he knows, and we all know, that it will be much more difficult to implement them. It will require greater courage to bombard or sink Argentine ships than to have landed 2,000 marines two weeks ago, which could have been done. Someone has blundered. I do not know who and I do not know how, but I have my suspicions, and they are directed inevitably—and regretfully—at both the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary.

It was not right that the Foreign Secretary should have been absent from the United Kingdom during this week—a time when it was becoming increasingly and abundantly plain that we were on the brink of a grave international crisis. These things must be said because we are talking about redeeming a situation. We are talking about restoring credibility. That is restoring the credibility not merely of a set of politicians and of a Government, but of our nation. We must all be determined to do that.

I should like to know why NATO, of which we are a member, issued an appeal, as the Prime Minister told us, to both sides asking them to restrain from hostility at a time when the invasion had apparently already taken place or was under way. I should also like to know why we attach so much importance to a telephone call made by the President of the United States. I should like to be assured that the President of the United States will stand four square with Britain, in a way that his predecessor did not in 1956.—[AN HON. MEMBER: "If my hon. Friend believes that, he will believe anything."]—My hon. Friend intervenes with a jocular aside at a time when we are not predisposed to be jocular. This is one of the most critical moments in the history of our country since the war.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her colleagues must look again at the defence strategy and capability of this country. If we are incapable of deterring and preventing a jumped-up junta of barbarous men from inflicting an appalling regime on British subjects, we must surely question the whole strategy that has been explained to the House in recent months.

I should think that there will be some anxious people in Gibraltar today. [AN HON. MEMBER: "And in Hong Kong."] There will also be anxious people in Hong Kong. There will be many anxious people who have felt for a long time that we were taking too cavalier an attitude towards the role of the Royal Navy, and who will demand that we rethink some of the things that we have propounded in recent weeks.

The whole House owes an indebtedness to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) for his courage and prescience. I hope that what he has said will be heeded more than it has been recently.

However, it is not too late to restore the credibility of the Government. It is desperate that we should do so. People said to me last night and this morning "We thought, above all, that we could sleep safely while your Government were in power." [Interruption.] That is no cause for hilarity. The Conservative Party has traditionally and rightly prided itself on its attitude towards defence. The Conservative Party has always rightly and properly placed defence at the head of its priorities when confronting the electorate. The electorate expects more of us than we have delivered up to now.

Therefore, our united resolve from today must be to utilise the unanimity that has been expressed in the debate. We should be grateful to the Leader of the Opposition and to the right hon. Member for Devonport for their support. We should resolve to present a united front, to know that we will not shirk, however distasteful the use of force may be, from trying to retrieve the situation, to free those prisoners and to restore to their proper territorial integrity those islands, which are bleak and barren, but which are dear to those who live on them, because they personify and embody the freedom that we also enjoy. That must be our task. If the Government fail in leading us along that line, many of us will have to question our position, on the Government Benches.

12.53 pm

Mr. Arthur Bottomley (Middlesbrough): In view of your appeal, Mr. Speaker, I shall confine my remarks about this unhappy affair to a sentence or two.

A few years ago at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting the Falkland Islands representatives said that at some time the Argentine might try to take the islands by force and that Britain should be prepared. Regrettably, we were not. May I ask the Prime Minister whether she has already assured our friends, and the Commonwealth, in particular, that so long as the Falkland Islands and their inhabitants wish to remain in the Commonwealth Britain will see that they do so?

12.54 pm

Mr. Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): I should like to offer a few words which I know will not be popular in the House, but they are based on three years' work in Argentina, trying to avoid the eventuality that now confronts us. [HON. MEMBERS: "For the Foreign Office."] That is right.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The Foreign Office was not working for Britain.

Mr. Whitney: I utterly refute that. I was working both for Britain and for the interests of the islanders.

Between 1970 and 1972 we negotiated a communications agreement which seemed to offer the promise of a long-term resolution of the dispute and to be very much in the interests of the Falkland islanders and absolutely in tune with their wishes. I am referring to the opening up of links with the Argentine in terms of travel, medical cover, educational and postal facilities and holidays. All those things now seem trivial and irrelevant, but in those days they seemed to offer hope of a gradual resolution of the crisis that has gone on for so long. That effort was made against the background of a large British community in Argentina, which was also trying to help the people of the Falkland Islands out of the dreadful situation. However, we now face the situation that all of us were trying hard to avoid.

Recriminations about what might have happened over the past months are not profitable today in this fevered climate. We must consider carefully what action we should take. I should like to offer a few considerations, which I hope very much the Government will bear in mind as the fleet steams towards the South Atlantic.

The reputation of this Government is based on courage and realism. [Interruption.] Opposition Members may laugh, but no one in the country doubts that the Government pursue their aims with courage and recognise,

not the world as we would like it to be, but as it is. It would not necessarily be courageous to respond instinctively as Britons, with our natural patriotic instincts. That would not be true courage. It is the courage to respond to all the editorial writers and to all the people in the pubs who understandably and rightly are saying this lunchtime: "What a dreadful and despicable thing has happened." Of course it is dreadful and despicable that the self-determination principle which for 60 years has been the major guiding idea of international relations—

Sir Frederick Burden (Gillingham): We are not responding to the newspapers. We are responding to an act of naked aggression against the Falkland Islands, which are occupied by British people. We are not prepared to see them annexed in this way.

Mr. Whitney: I recognise the point that my hon. Friend has made. I am asking the Government to take into account a number of considerations which will take place at the forefront of importance the interests and future of the Falkland islanders and also the reputation and tradition of our country. Therefore, we must consider these events carefully.

The easy way would be to respond thoughtlessly. I should like to outline to the Government the real problems that we will face when we move in. Are we ready as a nation, and shall we continue to be ready, to accept the military implications of what is involved in a landing on the islands? If we are, well and good, but are we ready to maintain that effort not for a week, not for a month, but for years? Or, if we speak of a blockade, are we ready to accept the implications of that for the Falkland Islanders now under the Argentine military occupation, or, I may say, for the large British community in Argentina? Are we ready to accept those considerations? It may be that we are, but I hope that we shall consider them carefully.

If we pursue the idea of a blockade, can we maintain, and are we capable of maintaining also, the necessary air cover, because, as the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said, a naval blockade is not adequate in itself. An air blockade will also be necessary. These are the questions that we must ask courageously.

Mr. Alan Clark (Plymouth, Sutton): My hon. Friend has omitted to state that Argentina is a bankrupt totalitarian country, with an inflation rate of 130 per cent. and in an exceedingly precarious social condition. It has no capacity for replacing equipment that is destroyed. It has no capacity for buying, building or launching ships to replace those that are sunk. It has no capacity for replacing ammunition. Yet my hon. Friend is talking as though this were a head-on confrontation with a world power.

Mr. Whitney: There are many things that I have omitted to state clearly. In the time available, even if it were within my power and knowledge, I cannot give a total analysis of the military and geopolitical implications. But I must ask my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), who is himself a military specialist, whether we are ready to maintain at 8,000 miles' distance the scale of military operation involved 200 or 300 miles from the Argentine mainland?

Sir Bernard Braine (Essex, South-East) rose—

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry, but I have already given way enough. It may be that we are prepared to maintain that scale of operation, but I hope very much that my hon. Friends will think about it very carefully.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*—

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry, but I cannot give way again. I believe that there are alternative ways in which the interests of the Falkland Islanders can be protected and I feel that these can be achieved by negotiation. I recognise that at this time the two efforts must go hand in hand, but let us not get led astray so that we lose the whole opportunity of negotiating a peaceful settlement; a settlement not only in the interests of the Argentines and the Falkland Islanders, we but in the interest of the honour of this country as well.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At a time of emergency like this, if defeatism of this kind is to be spoken, should it not be done in secret session? Would it be in order to spy strangers?

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not.

Mr. Whitney: I totally reject any suggestion of defeatism from my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison). But I earnestly implore the House to think very carefully, so that we make sure that we are ready to take and answer the challenges of the questions that are there. They will not go away if they are not enunciated. If we show that we are ready to overcome these immense problems, and at the same time pursue our diplomatic efforts, it is not a question of defeatism—it is a question of realism and the avoidance of another humiliation for our country.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand that it is hoped to begin the Front Bench speeches at twenty-five minutes past 1. I hope that hon. Members who are called will bear that in mind.

1.4 pm

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness): The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) must face the fact that this is without doubt a very shameful day for this country. The sort of view he put echoed in a strange way what I found, to my horror, in the editorial in *The Guardian* today. I will quote it:

"Reality number two is that the Falkland Islands do not represent any strategic or commercial British interest worth fighting over (unless one believes reports of crude oil under its off-shore waters)."

It is shocking that in a great newspaper such as *The Guardian* the view should be put that the only things worth fighting over are commercial matters and not the rights and freedoms of individual people. Every newspaper that I saw today showed pictures of President Galtieri with his thumbs up. To see that barbarous man rejoicing made me both depressed and angry—depressed that he had been given the opportunity, and angry at our neglect of a small group of people who unquestionably have trusted us and to whose trust we have not responded.

I shall say nothing at this stage about the Government's lack of preparedness, as that ground has been well covered. I add just one point to the very constructive intervention of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr.

Rowlands). It is not just a matter of our apparent inability to sustain an effective intelligence-gathering operation. What about the Americans—our allies? Surely the Americans have an effective intelligence-gathering operation in the Argentine. Surely, too, they should be in a position to tell us what is happening. If they do not do so, that is a matter of real concern within the alliance.

I am a member of the Falkland Islands Association. I also have several constituents who have lived in the Falkland Islands and have families there. One knows of the islanders' loyalty and also of the sustained low profile adopted by successive British Governments in relation to the Falkland Islands. We have looked weak in the Falkland Islands for a very long time. The Foreign Office has not been the friend of the Falkland Islands. As the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) said, they have been starved of money, with the result that a situation has now arisen in which vast amounts of money will have to be spent and in which results may be very difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, this is where the buck stops.

Mr. David Ennals (Norwich, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that decisions about the Falkland Islands or anything else to do with foreign policy are made by Ministers, not by civil servants? Civil servants may give wrong advice, but Ministers take the decisions. Will he also accept that Foreign Office Ministers in the Labour Government, of whom I was one for two years, with responsibility for the Falkland Islands, stood solidly by our commitments and moved not an inch from our standing for what the people of the Falkland Islands themselves believed in?

Mr. Johnston: I do not agree that this country has given adequate economic sustenance to the Falkland Islands for a considerable period.

In conclusion, as many other hon. Members wish to speak, I support the Government in sending the task force announced by the Prime Minister. Clearly it must be of sufficient size to operate a blockade. I also agree with the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) that, if we are to act at all, we must act swiftly. Clearly that has consequences. The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) was right to refer to the position of British citizens in the Argentine. Will the Government tell us how many such citizens there are? We must face the fact that this must have consequences for them. Even more serious, however, are the consequences of allowing this type of unprovoked aggression to pass without response. The Government have an enormously difficult task, but some of it is of their own making. They must now face up to it, and in doing so they will have our support.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand that the winding-up speeches are to begin at 1.30 pm, and not at 1.25 pm.

1.9 pm

Sir John Eden (Bournemouth, West): The most important point to emerge from the debate came in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when she affirmed that the Falkland Islands remain British territory and she committed the Government to freeing them from occupation and returning them to British sovereignty.

Like many hon. Members, I have long suspected that elements within the Foreign Office have been wanting to be rid of what they have regarded as a tiresome problem.

The one factor that has so far prevented that from happening has been the resolution of Ministers that it should not be so, but there has been a basic weakness within the Administration, and that has undermined our negotiating position and has deprived us of the possibility of having an alternative fall-back plan.

I hope that we shall never again hear about the dangerous doctrine that we cannot deploy force while talks are under way. Whatever the pressures against decisive action, which will undoubtedly be mounted in the international arena over the next few days and weeks, I hope that my right hon. Friend, who has now taken direct charge of these matters, will ensure that the Government's commitment is carried through to the earliest possible fulfilment, for the credibility of the Government and the honour of the country demands nothing less.

1.11 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Like the hon. Member for Inverness (Mr. Johnston), I, too, have constituents who have worked in the Falkland Islands. In fact, some of their families are there now. For many years, I have also been a member of the Falkland Islands committee.

Many of us have pressed Governments of both parties to do something for these people, and when this incident is passed we hope that a more realistic view will be taken of what they are entitled to.

I was interested in the comments of the right hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Sir J. Eden) about the Foreign Office, because one wonders on which side it has operated. That was illustrated by the Prime Minister's use of the phrase "discussing a dispute". There was no dispute. A totally unfounded claim was made by the Argentine over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. By regarding the matter as a dispute, we started from a position of weakness.

It is clear that there has been a lack of intelligence, information and preparedness, but, as other hon. Members have said, this is not the time to go into that. The fact remains that for many years successive Governments have given the people of the Falkland Islands an assurance that their interests would be protected. They are entitled to the right to self-determination, and they have said quite clearly that they have no wish to be taken under the wing of the Argentine.

Other hon. Members have said that everyone ought to declare where he stands. I hope that this matter can be resolved without force, but if force is necessary, so be it.

1.13 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): With perhaps one exception, the House has been absolutely unanimous in the view that the message for the Government and the rest of the world is that the British House of Commons is determined to ensure that the British Falkland Islands people shall be removed from the yoke of the Argentine Government.

I think that the Prime Minister's statement has been somewhat lost in the debate. She made it absolutely clear that a Navy task force was being assembled and that orders were being given for that to proceed.

It is quite obvious that that force cannot arrive to take action for a number of days—perhaps even 10 days or a fortnight. Two things must be certain—that any military action taken by Britain must be 99.9 per cent. certain of

being victorious. We must risk nothing that could bring about defeat. That is why the dangerous thought of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen)—that we should send a submarine to wander around without naval cover—was not very sensible.

Secondly, may I put it to the Prime Minister that, in the period before the task force arrives, we should announce to the world that we expect, and we will take positive action to ensure, that every diplomatic, trade and economic pressure is brought to bear upon the Argentines in order that they should withdraw before action becomes necessary.

The use of the United Nations in this manner is the proper and accepted use of that body. If that action of withdrawal has not been taken within the 10 or 14 days stipulated by the Government, a state of war should exist between Argentina and Britain. Confidence in the Government—which I have in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—can be adequately restored. The British people expect the Government to be able to defend our people wherever they are in the world. Whatever difficulties there may be, those are facts which we must understand. We must pursue every diplomatic measure that we can first of all, but after that there is only one possible action.

1.16 pm

Mr. Douglas Jay (Battersea, North): I want briefly to say only three things. First, in spite of all that we have heard today, I find it inexplicable that the Government made no preparations and, apparently, did not know what was going on throughout the whole of last month. Not only were there the usual press reports and all the normal signs, but the Government were repeatedly warned in the House—notably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South-East (Mr. Callaghan) who raised the matter as soon as the withdrawal of HMS "Endurance" was announced. It is now two and a half weeks since I asked the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, what defence forces we had in the Falkland Islands besides HMS "Endurance". I had hoped that that was a hint that if we had not any, we should have pretty soon.

The whole story will inevitably lead some people to think that the Foreign Office is a bit too much saturated with the spirit of appeasement. I hope that, apart from anything else, the Foreign Office will now examine its conscience, if it has one.

Secondly, I trust that this event will put an end to the policy of unilateral disarmament of the Royal Navy, which the Government have been carrying on. Unilateral disarmament always invites aggression, and unilateral disarmament of the Navy has invited aggression in this case. I hope that we will hear no more about cash limits in the next few weeks and that there will be no cash limits on any effective action that we now take.

Thirdly, I do not believe that diplomacy is enough in this situation. The Secretary of State for Defence made an extraordinary statement on television last night. He said that if we took any military preparatory action it would spoil our efforts at diplomacy. Exactly the opposite is true. Diplomacy can succeed only if it is visibly supported by effective action.

Effective action is necessary for two reasons. First, the rights of the people of the Falkland Islands are at stake. It does not matter how the British forces originally got

[Mr. Douglas Jay]

there 150 years ago. What matters now is that these people wish to remain British, and that is the right of self-determination.

Secondly, surely, as the whole history of this century has shown, if one gives way to this sort of desperate, illegal action, things will not get better, but will get worse. Therefore, if the Government act effectively they will have the support of the House and the country. But if they do not, they will be unreservedly condemned.

1.19 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Essex, South-East): This remarkable debate has been characterised by high-calibre speeches showing acute perception of the problem. Until my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Witney) spoke, I thought that the House was speaking with one voice in a moment of national crisis, warning the Government and expecting them to act. My hon. Friend is entitled to his view, but he seemed to be asking the Government to bear certain weighty considerations in mind with the object, no doubt, of pulling them back from any punitive action that they may wish to take to restore our sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. However, I find it odd that my hon. Friend, who has served in Buenos Aires, should omit to mention the most important consideration of all. We are dealing here not with a democratic country that has some claim to the Falkland Islands—with which the matter could be thrashed out in a civilised way—but with a Fascist, corrupt and cruel regime.

I have spent the past few years in fruitless negotiations with the Argentine ambassador about women and mothers of young children who have been picked up by the secret police and who have been spirited away. They are now among the disappeared ones. They have not been arrested for any criminal offence. They have never been brought to trial. Indeed, they may no longer be alive. They were seized simply because they were related to people who stood in the way of Argentina's fascist governors.

The very thought that our people, 1,800 people of British blood and bone, could be left in the hands of such criminals is enough to make any normal Englishman's blood—and the blood of Scotsmen and Welshmen—boil, too.

This is not a day for judgments to be made. True, it is a sad day, but not one for judgment yet. The Prime Minister was frank and open with the House. At present, none of us expects the Government to reveal the dispositions of our forces and any decisions that they may have taken. We do not expect that, but we do expect results. Unless firm and effective action is taken within a reasonable period of time to remove the invaders and to restore the islands to British sovereignty, the effect on the Government's standing will be dire. They will not be able to rely on my support. However, reading between the lines of the Prime Minister's remarks today, I venture to think that the right decisions have been taken. We must now wait upon events.

This crisis did not come upon us suddenly in the night. I stood at the Dispatch Box some 14 years ago and extracted a promise from the then Foreign Secretary, Mr. Michael Stewart—now Lord Stewart of Fulham—that in no circumstances would there be a transfer of sovereignty unless the Falkland Islanders so wished. Since then, we

have had weasel words from successive Foreign Office Ministers. One after the other has said the same thing, but they have acted in a way that has driven the Falkland Islanders into dependence on the Argentine for communication with the outside world. In other words, policy has not matched up to the assurances that have been given to Parliament. That sort of thing has happened before and may happen again. However, we must be on the *qui vive*. Such things happen too often. Parliament must be taken into the confidence of the Government of the day.

The time for weasel words has ended. I expect action from the Government; and I hope that we shall get it. However, let there be no misunderstanding. Unless the Falkland Islands are quickly restored to lawful British sovereignty, and unless their people are freed from the dreadful shadow under which they have lived for a decade or more, the effect on the Government will be dire.

1.25 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (South Ayrshire): I find it difficult to understand why the British Government were not aware of something of which the people of the Argentine seemed to be aware. Yesterday there appeared on the streets of towns and cities in the Argentine a newspaper entitled "Seven Days". That newspaper had all the details of the invasion. Therefore, I find it difficult to understand why the British Government did not know what was happening.

It is a question not only of the intelligence service that we have heard so much about and pay so much for, but of what our embassy was saying to us. I should like to know—I hope that we shall have an answer today from the Secretary of State—what our embassy was telling us about what was happening in Argentina. I should like to know what was the Foreign Office's interpretation of what the embassy was saying.

Many people have already said this, but it bears repeating by someone who went on a deputation to Cuba—allegedly briefed by the Foreign Office. When we arrived in Cuba, we found that we knew nothing about NATO exercises and the participation of a British nuclear submarine in those NATO exercises because the Foreign Office had failed to tell us about them. That is the Foreign Office that has been advising on this matter.

I must say that I have some reservations. I know that remark will not fall easily on the ears of hon. Members. Indeed, the words of the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) did not do so. I have some reservations about what seems to have been emerging, almost unanimously, as the view of the House.

I have some worries about how we can take effective action. It ought and needs to be said that, if we are to take effective action, we must examine the consequences. Inevitably, thousands of Argentines will be killed. We may not wish to weep any tears over them, but thousands of British troops will be killed as well. We must face those consequences. Inevitably, there will be recommitments against British people in the Argentine. If we know anything about the Argentine Government, we must know that.

What is more, can anyone with military knowledge tell me how we can retake the Falkland Islands without loss of life to the men, women and children whom we are saying that we are interested in protecting?

Mr. Ogden: I can tell the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Foulkes: I can think of no way round the problem.

Mr. Ogden rose—

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stevenage) rose—

Mr. Foulkes: My gut reaction is to use force. Our country has been humiliated. Every hon. Member must have a gut reaction to use force, but we must also be sure that we shall not kill thousands of people in the use of that force. I am in favour of the firmest possible diplomatic action and sanctions against the Argentine. I am in favour of asking the United States and all our allies to unite against the Argentine. However, I am against the military action for which so many have asked because I dread the consequences that will befall the people of our country and the people of the Falkland Islands.

1.29 pm

Mr. John Silkin (Deptford): My right hon. Friend the leader of the nation—[*Interruption.*] He soon will be. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition spoke for the nation when he talked about the Falkland Islanders and the fact that the whole House, whatever other views that we may have, is thinking of them at this moment. Yes, as the Prime Minister said, they have the right to be free. We also believe that they have the right to be defended, and there are one or two questions that need to be asked about this.

The truth of the matter is this very simple one. Today, I agree, is not a day of judgment—we cannot have recriminations—but it is a day of questions. It is on those questions and on the answers to those questions that this House must make its judgment in the debate that I hope will take place next week. It is essential that those questions should be answered.

Our thoughts are with our fellow citizens in the Falkland Islands. I share the concern expressed by many right hon. and hon. Members that what has taken place is the aggression of a Fascist dictatorship and a Fascist junta whose latest leader, General Galtieri, is probably the worst of the bunch of its leaders—a man who wears upon his chest the medals that he won in repressing his own people. When he says to us that he will respect the rights and property and, above all, the lives and freedom of our people, we have a right to wonder whether that is true in view of what he does to his own people. These are the important questions that we have to ask.

In those circumstances, I make one appeal above all others to the Government. Let us ensure that our dear fellow citizens in the Falkland Islands are kept in touch with us as much as possible. Let us extend our broadcasts. I do not know the technicalities that are involved. But let them hear our voice. Let them know they are not deserted. Let them know that we are thinking of them. That must be the first consideration. We must give them what advice we can in what are difficult times for them. They may be tempted to do things that it may not be prudent for them to do and that may interfere with our own plans. We must keep in touch with them whatever happens.

The Opposition agree absolutely with the Government that all the diplomatic measures necessary in the United Nations Security Council must be taken. We must press ahead with those diplomatic considerations as rapidly as possible. I do not know how many friends we may get. Those that we can get we must get. I have been cheered by the reaction of the French and the Irish.

When it comes to anything else, I wish to speak frankly to the House. I have said that this must not be a day of judgment or a day of recrimination. It is, however, a day of solid questioning. We are being asked to support the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence in what may or may not be a dangerous and difficult operation when all the indications are that heretofore they have blundered and bungled over the defence of the Falkland Islands. Had they acted speedily, with effect and force, and also, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) says, with foresight, this whole danger might never have occurred. It is right, before we give the Government any trust whatever, that we should ask and receive answers to three vital sets of questions.

Is it not a fact that all—no, not all, but large-scale—signals were being received by the Argentine junta that we did not perhaps mind so much, wrongly, I know, what might become of the Falkland Islands? It is within the recollection of the House that, in December 1980, the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office met a very cold reception in the House over the manner in which he had been speaking to people in the Falkland Islands. He had been saying to them "We are talking over with the Argentines the question of giving them your land and leasing it back. What do you think of that?" The House gave a very clear view. What, however, was the view taken in Buenos Aires? Was this not perhaps a signal to Buenos Aires that the will of the British Government and the British people was weakening? Was that not the first signal? One can turn to other signals. I have heard twice that the talks that took place at the end of February this year between the present Minister of State and his Argentine opposite number were cordial and positive. Cordial and positive for whom? What sort of effect did that have on the Argentines? Therefore, the first question that the right hon. Gentleman must answer when he replies is this: what was the substance of those talks, which were so cordial and positive that they have ended up with an Argentine invasion of British territory in the Falkland Islands?

There are also other signals such as the small question of HMS "Endurance". On 9 February this year—the Prime minister has something to answer for on this matter—my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South-East (Mr. Callaghan) asked:

"is the Prime Minister aware that the Government's decisions to withdraw and pay off HMS "Endurance" when she returns from the South Atlantic is an error that could have serious consequences?"

He continued:

"Is she further aware that this stale old proposition was put to me on more than one occasion when I was Prime Minister and after considering it I turned it down flat? Will she please do the same?"

The right hon. Lady replied:

"The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there are many competing claims on the defence budget . . . My right hon. Friend therefore felt that other claims on the defence budget should have greater priority."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1982; Vol. 17, c. 856-57.]

What about the Secretary of State for Defence? This has been a long week, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Huyton (Sir H. Wilson) once said that a week was a very long time in politics. This week started with the Trident debate and is ending with the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands.

[Mr. John Silkin]

On 29 March, Monday last, at a time when the Prime Minister assured us—I shall come to timing in a moment—that the British Government were becoming well aware of Argentine intentions and beginning to counter them, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) intervened in the speech of the Secretary of State for Defence and said:

"Will my right hon. Friend answer this riddle, which is worrying many people: how can we apparently afford £8,000 million to meet a threat in 13 years' time, which may possibly be true, when we cannot afford £3 million to keep HMS 'Endurance' on patrol to meet a threat that is facing us today?"

The answer to the riddle came from the Secretary of State for Defence. He said:

"I do not intend to get involved in a debate about the Falkland Islands now."

This was last Monday. He continued:

"These issues are too important to be diverted into a discussion on HMS 'Endurance'."—[Official Report, 29 March 1982; Vol. 21, c. 27.]

Whatever the Secretary of State's personal position, these signals were being heard loud and clear in Buenos Aires. The Argentines felt that Her Majesty's Government were no longer in a position or had the will to protect their fellow citizens in the Falkland Islands.

We were told that the Government were taken by surprise and, the Prime Minister said, rightly by surprise. She asked how we could respond to every possible threat from the Argentine. There have certainly been many threats, increasingly in recent years, but many threats over the past 150 years.

There is a second question that the right hon. Gentleman must answer. In December last year, when this present bargain basement Mussolini, Galtieri, seized power in the Argentine, he never made any pretence about what he intended to do. Not a day went by when he did not talk about recovering the Falkland Islands. He was the kind of man—we ought to have known it—who meant it.

Again, as the right hon. Gentleman said on 25 February and at the beginning of March, we were getting clearer and clearer indications that such an invasion was imminent. Where was the Foreign Office and where was the Foreign Secretary when all this was happening? Why did the Foreign Office not alert the Secretary of State for Defence? If it did not alert him, why did he not alert himself? It is extraordinary that we are spending £14.5 billion a year on defence, yet apparently were not ready, when the Argentine fleet set sail, although we had five or six weeks' notice of its intentions, to defend our people in the Falkland Islands.

Therefore, we have a right to ask a third question of the Secretary of State for Defence. Were we not totally unprepared by him for what was to come? Should we not have been prepared and should we not, in defence terms, have been ready to meet the attack? Why was it so long before we began to answer the threats that were being made—so long that even now we are apparently still assembling a task force?

I know that there are one or two of our ships—perhaps even a hunter-killer submarine or two—heading for the Falkland Islands, but we have had the time in which to be there. As has been pointed out twice—by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who was Foreign Secretary at the time, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr. Rowlands)—when my

right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South-East was Prime Minister, quietly and efficiently and in good time—that was the point—we assembled a fleet with which to say to the Argentinians "You shall not take the Falkland Islands from the British people who live there." We said it then. Why could we not say it now?

Why were we not prepared for what has happened? Why did the Secretary of State for Defence, as recently as last Monday, find himself in the position of saying that this was a tiny matter and a matter of no importance compared with the vital matters of Britain's defence, as he saw it, in 13 years' time?

The Secretary of State uses one adjective over and over again—"credible". "We must", he says, "have a credible defence force. We must have a credible defence policy". His policy is so credible that the dictator of Argentina is able to send his ships, invade our territory and then establish a military aggression in those islands.

So the Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Prime Minister herself have something to answer for. This is a collective decision of the three most guilty people in the Government. I acquit most of the others. They probably did not know what was going on. They probably believed that we were capable of defending the Falkland Islands and that the British people who live in those islands could sleep easily at night because they would be protected, as they had been under the previous Labour Government and, to be fair, under Administrations before that. So it is those three Ministers who are on trial today. It is not the moment for judgment, it is not the moment for recriminations, but it is the moment when those questions must be put and answered.

I fear something else. Unless those questions are answered—and answered very carefully—something else may happen. The House will know that the official Opposition do not believe that Britain has a credible—if I may borrow the Secretary of State's adjective—defence policy. We do not believe that the conventional forces—and in particular the naval and air strength of our country—are in the strength that they ought to be. This he knows, but I remind him that there are other people who are also listening. The dictator of the Argentine was busy listening for the signals. The Secretary of State must remember that there are other and nearer colonies which may suffer unless we take the necessary steps now.

The Government, as I have said, are on trial. We are not prepared to give them a blank cheque, and we would be foolish to do so unless they show that they are capable of answering those questions. If they are not capable of answering them, I say to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence "The sooner you get out the better."

1.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Nott): I wish to join the right hon. Member for Deptford (Mr. Silkin) in saying that today all our thoughts are with the British people of the Falkland Islands. I know that the whole House agrees with him on that.

Two main criticisms of the Government have emerged in the debate, certainly in my area of responsibility. There will be another debate on the subject very soon, so I cannot answer every point made by my hon. Friends. The first main criticism is that in some way the changes that we have made to our Naval programme and our other defence

arrangements have diminished our capability to respond to such a crisis. The second criticism is that the specific events that developed 14 days ago in South Georgia have caught us unprepared militarily.

The pledge of the right hon. Member for Deptford yesterday that we could count on the support of the official Opposition was welcome. Of course, there is much criticism of the Government on both sides of the House, but I hope that we can unite behind our Armed Forces and that they will have the full backing of the House in the difficult circumstances that we face. It is clear that the whole House accepts that the guarantee of political integrity granted to the Falkland Islands by successive Governments has been breached by an act of flagrant territorial aggression in the face of a determined diplomatic effort to solve the problem peacefully—without any sabre-rattling by the British Government. Our attempt to achieve a peaceful resolution of a long-standing dispute stretching back for many years under Governments of both parties might have been expected to appeal to the Leader of the Opposition. He welcomed our peaceful attempts to resolve the dispute. We shall all remember that, speaking for the whole House, he said that we would not wish to see foul brutal aggression succeed anywhere in the world. My right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) and the whole House applauded him for that remark, which we shall remember.

I wish to dispose of the question raised by the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell) about the conduct of the Royal Marines at Port Stanley. He referred to what I said at a press conference yesterday. I was asked

"Will the Royal Marines be told to surrender?"

I took that to mean, naturally, that they would be told to surrender without a fight. I replied:

"Of course not. No British soldier would be ordered to surrender."

By that, I meant without a fight. What else would anyone have answered at such a press conference?

The other major criticism that has been echoed on both sides of the House is that we should have reacted earlier with the despatch, either covertly or overtly, of some surface ships. There are two questions on that issue. First, should we have despatched earlier than we did a Naval task force? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Secondly, should we have deployed covertly some frigates, as the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South-East (Mr. Callaghan) did in 1977? With the wisdom of hindsight, the despatch of a large surface task force sufficient to deter or destroy the Argentine navy might have given pause to the Argentines. [Interruption.] Perhaps the House will allow me to argue the point through. As the incident at South Georgia began just 14 days ago, such a task force would not have reached the Falkland Islands in order to perform its task. It is impossible, as the right hon. Gentleman said, to know what psychological impact such a force might have had on Argentine intentions, but certainly in deterrence terms, had it been successful, that large task force would have had to remain perhaps indefinitely in Falkland waters, in detriment to its other tasks. But as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in opening this debate, we were throughout seeking a peaceful solution through the United Nations and by other means.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South) rose—

Mr. Nott: I have only a few minutes in which to answer this debate. The Prime Minister said in opening this debate that we were throughout seeking a peaceful solution to this

dispute, and such an act, at a moment when we might have been going to the United Nations, would have seemed highly provocative and would probably—[Interruption.]

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds) rose—

Mr. Nott: The other option—

Mr. Griffiths rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is clear that the Minister will not give way. He is now prepared to give way.

Mr. Griffiths: I have this precise question to put to my right hon. Friend, and I speak as one of his supporters. Understanding full well, as I do, the psychological difficulties of a large surface fleet, why did he not put the hunter-killer submarines on station two weeks ago?

Mr. Nott: If my hon. Friend will allow me to continue with what I was saying. The other option would have been the deployment of a small force insufficient to resist the Argentine Navy, as was done in 1977. May I comment first on this particular proposal, because there seems to be a difference of view between the then Prime Minister and the then Foreign Secretary about the events in 1977. The right hon. Member for Cardiff, South-East (Mr. Callaghan) said that this force in 1977 became known and that a diplomatic solution followed, whereas the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said yesterday on the radio that it was done in total secrecy—[Interruption]—but he added that it gave him confidence in his negotiations, whatever that might mean. [Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nott: Presumably to deter, the presence of the force must have been known. If so, to have sent it, then it would have had precisely the same objections to a peaceful solution. [Interruption.] If this were a covert deployment, which I believe that it was, it could not have deterred if its presence was not known; and even if the size of the force had been revealed, it could have provided nothing more than a tripwire of exactly the same kind provided by HMS "Endurance" and provided by the Royal Marine garrison on Port Stanley.

Mr. Foot: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to say that there was some difference of opinion, but it was clearly stated by my right hon. Friend when the fact became known without fuss and publicity, and it had a success. That is the difference. What happened in 1977 was a success. This is a terrible failure.

Mr. Nott: I do not think that one is able to draw that conclusion.

Dr. Owen: If the right hon. Gentleman as Secretary of State for Defence has not understood the value to a Foreign Secretary of being able to negotiate in a position of some military influence and strength, he should not be Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Nott: Of course I understand that. However, as the Leader of the Opposition said in opening the debate, there can be no evidence that the position of the frigates in the South Atlantic at that time brought about the settlement of that dispute.

Several hon. Members have spoken of the problems that we now face. I do not seek to hide from Parliament the formidable difficulties with a crisis 8,000 miles away.

[Mr. Nott]

However, the United Kingdom has the ability to mount a major naval task force and to sustain it for a period at that distance. The charge that the Royal Navy cannot do this is flagrantly and patently untrue. We have that capability, as will certainly be evident, and it amounts to a formidable force which no other nation in the world possesses with the exception of the Soviet Union and the United States.

If we were unprepared, how is it that from next Monday, at only a few days' notice, the Royal Navy will put to sea in wartime order and with wartime stocks and weapons? That force will include the carriers HMS "Invincible" and HMS "Hermes", the assault ship HMS "Fearless" and a number of destroyers and frigates armed with anti-surface and anti-air missiles together with afloat support. A strong force of Royal Marine commandos and a large number of Sea Harriers and anti-submarine and troop-carrying helicopters will also be embarked.

I suggest that no other country in the world could react so fast and the preparations have been in progress for several weeks. We were not unprepared. I must make it clear to my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) that the carrier, HMS "Illustrious" is now undergoing sea trials. She will be joining the carrier HMS "Ark Royal" and we shall retain an out-of-area capability during the 1980s and 1990s to deal with this sort of problem—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister should be allowed to be heard.

Mr. Nott: I conclude by saying—[HON. MEMBERS: "Resign."]—that the Government do not pretend that the

situation is anything but extremely grave. The resolution of this problem will undoubtedly be all the more difficult since the occupation. We intend to solve the problem and we shall try to solve it continually by diplomatic means, but if that fails, and it will probably do so, we shall have no choice but to press forward with our plans, retaining secrecy where necessary and flexibility to act as circumstances demand.

The military problems are formidable, but they are certainly not insoluble because of the professionalism, the preparedness and the quality of our defences, which for our nation's size are unique in the free world. I do not believe the claim that the new Labour Party, with its well-known and well-advertised anti-defence bias and lack of commitment to defence spending, would have done any better. The Government will accept criticism—[HON. MEMBERS: "Resign".] But I believe—

Hon. Members: Go.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is less than a minute left for the Secretary of State.

Mr. Nott: I believe that the Government will have the support of the opposition parties in what we now intend to do. We can at least—and I would like to say this—give to the Armed Forces the unanimous backing of this House in the difficult task that they are being asked to undertake.

It being Two o'clock, Mr. SPEAKER adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Order this day.

Adjourned accordingly till Monday next, pursuant to the Resolution of the House yesterday.

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No. 68



Saturday
3 April 1982

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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LONDON

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House of Lords

Saturday, 3rd April, 1982.

The House met at eleven of the clock, having been called together by the Lord Chancellor, in pursuance of Standing Order 14: The LORD CHANCELLOR on the Woolsack.

Prayers—Read by the Lord Bishop of London.

Oil and Gas (Enterprise Bill)

Brought from the Commons, read 1^a, and printed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 47.

Motion—The Falkland Islands

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Baroness Young): My Lords, I hope the House will allow me to say a brief word about our rather unusual business today. I understand that in another place it is intended that their debate should be limited to three hours. Without in any way wishing to curtail speeches or to prevent noble Lords from speaking, I think it would be generally desirable if we could keep the debate on the Motion of my noble friend Lord Carrington to within approximately the same limits as another place. I am sure that noble Lords will, in our usual way, exercise restraint along these lines.

Lord Peart: I wish to endorse what the noble Baroness has said, my Lords. We support the noble Baroness the Leader in this connection, and I hope noble Lords will show some respect for brevity.

11.7 a.m.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Lord Carrington) rose to move. That this House takes note of the situation in the Falkland Islands.

The noble Lord said: My Lords, as your Lordships will know from yesterday's news why it has been appropriate and necessary for the House to sit today. Argentine forces have invaded the Falkland Islands and established military control. We meet at a time of grave crisis. We do not have full details of the present circumstances in the islands, but the fact of the Argentine occupation is clear. The House will condemn this unprovoked aggression by the Government of Argentina against British territory.

The Argentine action has been in the most cynical disregard of the appeals made by both the Secretary General of the United Nations and by the President of the Security Council on 1st April that both Britain and Argentina should refrain from the use of force and should resolve present tensions by diplomatic means.

The Falkland Islands and the Falkland Island dependencies remain British territory, inhabited by British people. It is our firm objective to ensure that they are freed from alien occupation. Our sovereignty dispute with the Argentine is long-standing. But

we have no doubt about British sovereignty. We cannot accept that the clear wishes of Falkland Islanders, who are British by blood and wish to remain so by allegiance, should be frustrated by armed force.

It may be helpful to rehearse the history of the past two weeks. On 19th March, the Commander of the British Antarctic Survey at Grytviken on South Georgia reported that an Argentine Navy transport vessel was anchored at nearby Leith and that a party of about 60 Argentines had set up camp and had raised the Argentine flag. The base commander told them that they had no right to land on South Georgia without seeking the required permission from the British authorities at Grytviken, which is the only point of entry for immigration purposes. He requested them either to seek the necessary clearance or to leave.

Her Majesty's Government sought immediate clarification from the Argentine Government, making clear that we regarded this illegal presence as potentially serious and asking the Argentines to arrange for the departure of the ship and the party. The Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied any knowledge of the Argentine presence but said they would look into the matter. Subsequently, the ship and most of the party did leave, on 22nd March, but a number of Argentines remained. HMS "Endurance" was ordered to the area to assist as necessary.

Since that time we have made repeated requests to the Argentine Government for them to regularise the position of the Argentine party, either by arranging their departure or by seeking the correct authority. We made clear that, while we accepted that the salvage contract on which the men were employed was a straightforward commercial undertaking, we could not accept that they should remain illegally in South Georgia. We emphasised throughout to the Argentine Government that we nonetheless wished to do everything possible to avoid this incident developing into a serious confrontation, and we made all possible efforts to resolve the problem through diplomatic channels.

All our initiatives, however, were rejected. It became increasingly clear that the Argentine Government were bent on confrontation. They asserted that South Georgia was Argentine territory and that the Argentine men at Leith would be given "all necessary protection" by the Argentine Government. In a further attempt to defuse what was now clearly developing into a most dangerous situation, I sent a message to the Argentine Foreign Minister proposing the despatch to Buenos Aires of a personal emissary to work out some means of settling the issue peacefully. On 1st April—that is, Thursday—the Foreign Minister flatly rejected that proposal; the diplomatic channel, he said, was now closed, and any further discussion would be simply to arrange the modalities of a transfer to Argentina of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and Falkland Island dependencies.

In this critical situation, following a personal appeal by the United Nations Secretary-General to the British and Argentine Governments, we sought an emergency meeting of the Security Council on 1st April, which led to a statement by the President of the Security Council calling on both sides to refrain from using force. Our representative associated himself with that statement, but the Argentine representative did not.

[LORD CARRINGTON.]

It was now clear that the Argentine Government were set on nothing less than the forcible occupation of the Falkland Islands. To prevent this, we sought the assistance of other Governments, including the United States Government. But all their efforts, including a personal appeal from President Reagan to the Argentine President, were rejected.

The House will be aware that the position remained uncertain for much of yesterday. We had no communication with the Governor from very early in the morning because of communication and atmospheric difficulties, which, as your Lordships know, are frequent in that area. Initial Argentine claims about the invasion were clearly premature, and that was why we wished to be sure of the situation before confirming to Parliament that the invasion had taken place. It would, I think, have been wrong for us to act on unconfirmed Argentinian reports.

The House will wish to know the present situation. It is clear that the Argentine forces are in control of Port Stanley and the main Falkland Islands.

The Uruguayan Government were approached last night by the Argentine authorities with a request that the Governor of the islands and the Marine detachment from Port Stanley should be allowed to land in Montevideo from Buenos Aires this morning. After consulting our Ambassador, the Uruguayan Government agreed. An RAF VC 10 has left the United Kingdom to pick up the party from Montevideo, returning to this country on Sunday afternoon.

The Prime Minister has spoken to the Governor by telephone in Montevideo this morning. The Governor told the Prime Minister that he could not praise too highly the conduct of the Marine detachment, who had fought bravely against overwhelming odds.

Several noble Lords: Hear, hear!

Lord Carrington: The Governor said that the Argentine forces had attacked Port Stanley from both the landward and the seaward sides at approximately six in the morning yesterday local time. The Governor had attempted to inform the British Government of the position before he was captured and had sent a last message to London. However, communications difficulties had meant that it did not get through. The Governor said that the atmosphere among the islanders was one of immense sadness at the turn of events and the alien presence with which they were now faced. But their loyalty to Britain remained undiminished. There had been no civilian casualties. The Prime Minister thanked the Governor for all his efforts and, through him, the Royal Marines.

The position in the dependences is less clear. There was of course already an Argentine presence on South Georgia and an Argentine naval vessel lying off the islands. The position in the South Sandwich Islands is also not clear. There is of course no British presence there, but the Argentines have had an illegal presence in the island of South Thule, as the House knows, since 1976.

After the Argentine invasion had begun, we immediately summoned a further emergency meeting of the Security Council, at which our representative made

clear our total condemnation of Argentine's unprovoked aggression, and asked the Council to pass a resolution calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of all Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands. We received firm support from those who spoke, apart from the Argentine representative himself. The Council will resume today, when we hope that the resolution will be passed.

We have asked our friends and allies for their support and help, at the United Nations, in their contacts with the Governments of the Argentine and elsewhere. The Foreign Ministers of the European Community yesterday issued a firm statement of support for us, condemnation of Argentina, and a call for her withdrawal. The Americans have spoken strongly in our favour, as have many other governments. The NATO Council has met, and our Allies have deplored the use of force.

The Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Secretary-General have both addressed messages to all Commonwealth Heads of Government asking for their support. The response so far has been heartwarming and encouraging.

As soon as news of the invasion was confirmed, the Argentine *Chargé d'Affaires* in London was summoned to the Foreign Office to be told that we had no option but to break off diplomatic relations immediately. He was asked to ensure that embassy staff left the country within four working days.

Nevertheless, the situation at the moment is that the Argentines remain illegally in control of territory which they have illegally invaded. It is to be expected in the circumstances that criticisms should have been expressed of the Government's handling of the situation. They are, in my judgment, for the most part based on a very considerable misunderstanding of the situation. I have heard it said that we should have moved forces to the area a month ago. A month ago, the Minister of State, Mr. Luce, had just concluded friendly talks in New York with his Argentine opposite number, and we seemed to have reached agreement on a satisfactory basis for further negotiations with the Argentines. They had then sent me a further message, and I was preparing a reply.

It is true that the Argentine negotiator, Señor Ros, appears to have been regarded by some in Buenos Aires as having been too reasonable; and, on his return home, there was considerable comment in the Argentine press urging the use of "other means" if negotiations could not be taken forward quickly. Had this been the first time over the last 20 years that some allusion to the use of force had been made from the Argentine side, it might have struck us as more significant than it did. But this has been part of the currency for many years; and history, up till now, has shown that wiser counsels have prevailed.

My Lords, it is argued, again, that ship deployments somehow resolved a similar problem in 1977. I am not quite sure that I understand what is being claimed. The truth of the matter is surely fairly simple. If the presence of British ships in or near to the area was unknown to the Argentines, it cannot possibly be said to have acted as a deterrent. Neither, had they known about it, would the Argentines have been deterred from an invasion on which they were determined by a force very much inferior to their own. The

only effective deterrent would have been a large force in the immediate area; and it is a fact of life that the collecting and despatching of such a force would have become known to the Argentines long before it got near enough to the Falkland Islands to do any good. Once again, such a decision would have risked precipitating just the step we are seeking to avoid. The truth of the matter, I suspect, is that in 1977, as on other occasions over the past 20 years, indications that the Argentines might have resorted to force proved unfounded in the event. Had this not been the case, we should have been no better placed to respond immediately and effectively to a large-scale invasion than we were yesterday.

Another argument is that we should have deployed ships as soon as the Argentine scrap merchants landed in South Georgia. Had we done so at that time, I have no doubt whatsoever that we should have been accused of inflaming the situation and of reacting in a way quite disproportionate to the problem posed by the presence of a small party of Argentine workers in South Georgia. They were, after all, said to be there to conduct work under an established contract; there was no indication at that time that they had anything else in mind; and they were at fault only because they had at first failed and then refused to comply with the normal rules of immigration.

I do not of course seek to condone their behaviour—far from it—but I am sure we were right to see in this a situation which had to be put right by negotiation and not by a show of force. But, in any event—and this brings home the geographical problems and difficulties involved—even had we sent ships to the area as soon as the Argentines landed in Leith on 18th March, they would still not have today arrived in the Falkland Islands or South Georgia.

Finally, there is the criticism that the Falkland Islands should have been better defended on a continuing basis. To this, I can say only that successive British Governments have recognised that we could not sensibly maintain in the South Atlantic naval and air power sufficient to deal with, and thus to deter, an Argentine invasion on the scale which has occurred. A look at the map, and at what it requires to maintain considerable naval and air forces some 8,000 miles from base, is sufficient to explain why.

My Lords, we shall continue to do all we can to ensure that our position is understood by the international community and that the unacceptable nature of the Argentine action is fully appreciated. We continue to wish for a peaceful solution to the situation which has now arisen. We hope that it will rapidly become clear to the Argentine Government that their behaviour is internationally unacceptable, and that a total withdrawal of all Argentine forces and the restoration of the Falkland Islands and their dependencies to British control in accordance with our sovereignty must follow.

Meanwhile, we have to face the reality that diplomacy may continue to prove insufficient to deal with Argentine aggression. The Government have therefore decided that, in addition to the naval deployments already made, a large task force should sail for the area as soon as all the preparations are complete. Their orders will depend on the situation at the time of their arrival. But Her Majesty's Government are deter-

mined to uphold the right of the Falkland Islanders to maintain their British way of life and to determine their own allegiance. The geographical distance and the small size of their community do not affect the applicability to them of the principle of self-determination. I know the House will join with me in making clear to all concerned our resolve to uphold the wishes of the islanders in the face of Argentina's cynical disregard of them. The Falkland Islands are British. The Falkland Islanders wish to be British. Our duty is clear.

The Lord Chancellor (Lord Hailsham of Saint Marylebone): My Lords, is the noble Lord moving a Motion?

Lord Wigg: My Lords—

Several noble Lords: Order!

The Lord Chancellor: May I ask the noble Lord whether he is moving a Motion?

Lord Carrington: Yes, my Lords.

Moved, That this House takes note of the situation in the Falkland Islands.—(Lord Carrington.)

Lord Wigg: My Lords, can the Foreign Secretary tell us—

Several noble Lords: Order!

The Lord Chancellor: The Question is that the Motion standing in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, be agreed to.

Lord Shackleton: My Lords, it is—

Lord Wigg: My Lords—

Several noble Lords: Order! Order!

11.26 a.m.

Lord Shackleton: My Lords, it is with very considerable sorrow that we in your Lordships' House have to debate such a situation—I speak as one of those who have had associations with the Falklands and with the sturdy, loyal and typically British way of life of the islanders—in the knowledge that the islanders are now under the rule of a foreign invader; and it is, of course, a humiliation which we must acknowledge. The last occasion I can recall on which a colony surrendered to force was in Singapore.

I think the House will wish to treat the Foreign Secretary with kindness. I shall certainly not stick knives into him, though there are plenty of others on his own Benches, particularly in another place, who will wish to do so when they see what has happened in these last few days. Furthermore, last night I saw him and the Secretary of State for Defence "on the box". They looked sad. Indeed, the Secretary of State was not his usual firm and ebullient self; and I do not want to add to his troubles, all the more so since it is the history of the British, of previous Governments and of Parliament, that we find ourselves in situations of

Rest omitted