

MR PYM IN REPLY TO MR DICK DOUGLAS

I am doing everything that I humanly can to achieve a peaceful settlement but we have to be realistic because in an endeavour to uphold the freedom of peoples and to defend the liberty of peoples it has at times sadly in history been necessary to resort to military means. Nobody wants that to happen but we cannot exclude that possibility but I will exclude it so long as negotiations are in play. We want to do everything we can to achieve a peaceful result. That is as far as I can go.

Falkland Islands

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Francis Pym): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement on the Falkland Islands.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House yesterday that I would be travelling to Washington tomorrow to discuss with Mr. Haig our reactions to the latest Argentine proposals. I believe I do so with the support of the whole House.

Any negotiation which is concluded satisfactorily must deal with certain critical points: in particular the arrangements for the Argentine withdrawal; the nature of any interim administration of the islands, and the framework for the negotiations on the long-term solution to the dispute for which the United Nations resolution calls. We put to Mr. Haig, when he was in London, ideas which we believed would commend themselves to the House and accord with the wishes of the islanders. He subsequently took them to Buenos Aires. The latest Argentine proposals—despite Mr. Haig's efforts—still fail to satisfy our essential requirements in certain important respects relating to these points. They reflect continuing efforts by Argentina to establish by her aggression and her defiance of the United Nations—a defiance continued and aggravated by her reinforcement of her invasion force—what could not be established by peaceful means.

These are some of the main issues that I shall be discussing with Mr. Haig, and I shall of course have some ideas of our own to put forward.

We continue to keep in close touch with our friends. In particular, I was glad that a meeting of Community Foreign Ministers could be arranged yesterday under the auspices of the Belgian presidency and that Ministers were able to attend despite the inevitably short notice. I took the opportunity to thank them personally for their support and to explain the situation to them. They reaffirmed their support for us, emphasising the importance of securing the implementation of Security Council resolution 502, their hope for a peaceful solution and their gratitude to Mr. Haig.

Since I last reported to the House, messages from the Falklands suggest that the islanders are still able to leave if they wish: a further party of 30 are on their way to Montevideo. Most of those leaving appear not to be permanent residents of the islands.

The most recent contact with the 15 remaining scientists and wildlife photographers on South Georgia through the British Antarctic survey was at 4 pm yesterday our time. I am happy to report that all were safe and well and in good heart.

I shall continue to keep the House informed.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I thank the Foreign Secretary for making his statement. I think that he recognises that the House wishes to be kept continually informed of developments as they occur. We welcome the right hon. Gentleman's visit to Washington and hope for its success.

I hope that I may be permitted to express our gratitude to Secretary Haig—I am sure that it is the view of the whole House—for the indefatigable efforts that he has made in the negotiations. I cannot recall any representative

of any Government who has shown greater stamina—intellectual, physical and moral—than he has shown. If we are to believe reports from Buenos Aires, he has put the views of the British people with great force and vigour in the discussions, as no doubt he has put the views of the Argentine Government to us.

We welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement—the point was made by the Prime Minister yesterday—that islanders who wish to leave the islands at this time are free to come here. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that the Government robbed the islanders of full British nationality in their recent Bill, in spite of the tied vote in the House of Lords.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (West Lothian): Hear, hear.

Mr. Healey: Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance that any resident of the islands who wishes to come to Britain to settle here will be free to do so whatever decisions the Government may have taken earlier in their drafting of the British Nationality Bill?

I welcome the clear desire of the Foreign Secretary to achieve a peaceful settlement of this dispute. I shall not quote what he has been reported as saying to some of his friends yesterday about the Duke of York, but he can be assured that we, too, wish to see the British forces able to leave the area without using force in order to secure our needs. The right hon. Gentleman must recognise that the quite exceptional support that the British Government have had from the British people, all parties in the House, the European Community, the Commonwealth and the United Nations depends critically on the Government demonstrating continuously that they are determined to seek a diplomatic solution of this crisis by peaceful means, and that they will spare no effort to secure such a result if that proves possible.

It seems that the central problem on which the right hon. Gentleman has fixed his attention is the interim arrangements after the Argentine forces leave the islands. I was surprised that he did not mention among the three critical elements the wishes of the islanders themselves, although he referred to them in a later part of his statement. I hope that he will reassure the House that it is still his intention to ensure that any settlement is one which is acceptable not only to the House but to the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands.

As for the interim arrangements, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will continue to consider, as he promised last week, the possibility of asking the United Nations to provide an administrator for the islands. It seems that that at least would be agreed by all Members on both sides of the House as being preferable to a situation which involved the Argentines in exercising administrative powers on the islands after the withdrawal of their forces.

I say on behalf of the Opposition that the strength of the Government's case in the world has depended in large part on the extraordinary and impressive support that we received in the Security Council in the beginning. It is immensely important that we put the United Nations charter at the centre of our policy. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not be dissuaded by any voices on the Labour Benches from recourse to the United Nations whenever it appears possible that it might make a useful contribution either to a solution within the context of Mr. Haig's efforts or to a more permanent solution by other means.

Mr. Pym: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) for what he said at the start of his remarks. I endorse all that he said about the efforts that are being made by Mr. Haig. Everyone is extremely appreciative of that. I shall convey the right hon. Gentleman's remarks to Mr. Haig tomorrow.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been quite clear about the islanders who may wish to settle here. A number of the islanders already have that automatic right. My right hon. Friend made a statement in which he indicated that there would be no difficulties put in the way of anyone on the islands who wished to settle here. I think that I am right in saying that he gave that undertaking quite explicitly. I hope that that will reassure the right hon. Gentleman.

My journey tomorrow and all the efforts that I am making are designed to secure a peaceful settlement. There is no doubt that that is what everybody would like to achieve. I shall spare no effort in seeking to do that. We must hope that success will attend those endeavours, but one cannot be sure. I have made it clear to the British people and to the House just how difficult it is and how many awkward problems remain to be solved. I do not want anybody to be under the misguided impression that negotiations will in any way be easy. I do not wish to mislead anybody. There is the contemplation of the possibility that in the end the negotiations to secure a peaceful settlement may not be successful. We hope desperately that they will be.

There are a number of central problems. The interim arrangements are important. As I think I said on Monday, I would not exclude any possibility at this stage, because that would be a silly stance to take. However, there are other issues that are equally important, including the withdrawal of the Argentine forces, the question of sovereignty and the wishes of the islanders, on which we have made our position clear on several occasions—the right hon. Gentleman made rather a point about that.

The issue here is one of international order. We are dealing with the basic charter of the United Nations, of which self-determination forms a part. It is a wide issue which has associations and connotations for many countries and peoples, not just, as in this case, the wishes of the islanders: Therefore, that is an important issue. The Government have made their position clear on all those central issues.

Mr. David Steel (Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles): The United Nations may well have a role in the long-term administration of the Falkland Islands. However, the Foreign Secretary is right in the immediate crisis to continue to use the good offices of the United States Administration in an attempt to achieve the Argentine withdrawal from the islands. For that reason, he carries the good wishes of all parties in the House in his mission.

Mr. Pym: I am grateful for what the right hon. Gentleman has said. The withdrawal of Argentine forces from the islands is, of course, a prerequisite for any further progress.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I propose to allow questions today to run until 4 o'clock as I did on Monday.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it may not be possible to

reconcile the claims of the Argentine with our responsibilities? Therefore, that may lead inevitably to the use of force. But might not this be the moment to try to raise the level of debate while there is still time? Might it not be the time for my right hon. Friend to propose, while maintaining our sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, the creation of a South Atlantic community to which the riparian States might adhere and which might be extended to the southern hemisphere, along with Australia and New Zealand and the signatories of the Antarctic treaty, for the development of the Antarctic continent? Might not such an imaginative idea gain the support of the European Community and the United States and give the Argentine Government, or at least their successor, an opportunity to withdraw from the impossible position in which they have put themselves?

Mr. Pym: I shall certainly consider my right hon. Friend's suggestion. The concept is essentially a long-term one. I doubt that thinking in that direction will contribute a great deal to the immediate problem which we are discussing. However, I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the thought that he has put to the House, but it is for the longer term.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South): Is it still the intention of Her Majesty's Government to restore British administration of the islands?

Mr. Pym: That is still Her Majesty's Government's intention.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): The House will be grateful to my right hon. Friend for the information about the islanders' ability still to leave the islands if they so wish. Bearing in mind the concern that is felt by many relations and friends of the islanders, more particularly those in South Georgia, can he give an assurance that all reasonable steps will be taken to remove civilian personnel from South Georgia?

Mr. Pym: We are doing all that we can. In the first instance, we have tried to obtain an International Red Cross presence on the islands. So far, that has not been agreed to. The Argentine Government have said that they do not believe that to be necessary. Such evidence as we have on that issue would suggest that they are possibly right. We are doing all that we can, within the narrow limits available to us, to care for the welfare of the islanders in the way that my hon. Friend would wish.

Dame Judith Hart (Lanark): Given the complexity of the negotiations that the Foreign Secretary is about to undertake, and the need to involve the United Nations if that is possible, as the task force moves steadily nearer the Falklands, are the Foreign Secretary and the Government giving priority to peace?

Mr. Pym: I do not see how anybody could say that we have done anything other than give a priority to peace. All our efforts are designed to achieve that. I have made it clear how difficult that might be.

As to the right hon. Lady's point about the United Nations, our first action was to go to the United Nations after the invasion. Resolution 502 was secured and that is still in breach. The first thing that the United Nations should do is to take whatever steps it deems appropriate to see that it is carried out.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that he will carry the support of

all hon. Members in giving a priority to peace? He has a well established precedent. It was Sir Winston Churchill—no appeaser—who said:

"Jaw-jaw is better than war-war."

Does he recognise that when he is in Washington a time will come when, if no response to British ideas is forthcoming from the Argentine, it will be right to tell the United States that it must apply economic sanctions to the Argentine?

Mr. Pym: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's opening remark. Of course, we want to achieve a peaceful solution. He referred to Sir Winston Churchill's words, with which all hon. Members would agree. However, Sir Winston was also a great warrior, and on occasions it does happen—and it has happened—that in order to preserve principles of freedom and democracy, if it is not possible to achieve the result by peaceful means, other methods must be used. The House must face that. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that so long as there is any way in which I can, with Mr. Haig's, or anybody else's help, secure a peaceful solution, that is what my endeavour will be.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I wish my right hon. Friend success in Washington and I hope, as much as any hon. Member does, that there will be a peaceful outcome. Will my right hon. Friend explain how there can be any interim arrangement with the Argentine junta? Surely, when the Argentines evacuate the Falklands, we shall immediately restore British Administration. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance to the House that our interests in the South Atlantic will be safeguarded and that the interests of the islanders will always be paramount?

Mr. Pym: We, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have made our position clear on that latter point. Of course, we want to preserve British interests in the South Atlantic. However, the House understands that at this stage I do not want to involve myself with the House in any details of any negotiations, particularly because there are new ideas and proposals coming forward. In a sense, that is an encouraging sign because, while there are new proposals which may be considered or rejected by one side or the other, there is undoubtedly life in the negotiations. However, I do not want to go into details at this stage.

Mr. Ioan Evans (Aberdare): As well as meeting Alexander Haig, will the right hon. Gentleman also call on the United Nations in case the Haig initiative fails so that we can be thinking ahead as to what course the United Nations can take in the future?

The right hon. Gentleman says that he has ideas of his own to put forward. When will the House know what they are?

As the naval ratings will now stay in the South Atlantic for a longer period than anticipated, may we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence that their redundancy notices will be withdrawn?

Mr. Pym: On the latter point, no doubt the hon. Gentleman will put a question to my right hon. Friend, who I am sure will make the position clear.

It is not my intention on this visit to include a visit to the United Nations. It is not inconceivable that that might happen at some stage. I am going to Washington to see Mr. Haig. That is where the negotiations will take place and that is the right place for me to be in the next day or two.

Sir Frederick Burden (Gillingham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the basis of this whole matter is that British land, occupied by British people who speak only our language, has been annexed by force by a ruthless dictator by naked aggression? As we have seen in the past, if we bow to that, the civilised world as we know it will start to collapse. Therefore, the area of compromise must be very small. We shall abide by any compromise, but we cannot be sure that a dictator will not use a compromise to promote his wishes and to take over the Falkland Islands to the exclusion of those people.

Mr. Pym: I repeat that we are dealing with the fundamental question of international order and how countries order their affairs. It is not only in the Falkland Islands that there has been an invasion. The House must not forget that Afghanistan was overrun about two years ago. That country is denied the possibility of self-determination. There are other areas in which that fundamental principle is being breached. We should appreciate that it is not only in the South Atlantic that people are being denied that right. That is why it should be perfectly clear to members of the United Nations and, at any rate, to all freedom-loving and democratic countries that they have an interest in our problem, just as we have an interest in other areas, such as Afghanistan, that have been overrun. Therefore, my hon. Friend is entirely right to point out the basic principle at stake.

Mr. George Foulkes (South Ayrshire): As time is now running out for a peaceful solution, and as we have now agreed to exchange ideas with Argentina, would it not be quicker and more effective for the Foreign Secretary to meet the Foreign Secretary of Argentina directly, if necessary under the auspices of the United Nations?

Mr. Pym: That would not be helpful at present. As I have said, I believe in the last debate, a solution of the problem by the negotiations undertaken by Mr. Haig is the best outcome that can be achieved. A direct visit by me now would not be helpful. It is better to use Mr. Haig's good offices. The fact that he has had to spend so long in Buenos Aires and quite a long time in London indicates the nature of the difficulty and the extent of the differences. We must go on using that machinery. It is the most helpful way of obtaining a peaceful settlement.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although we are prepared to be patient in our search for peace, any settlement that involves an armed or active Argentine presence on the Falkland Islands would not be acceptable in Britain? Does he also accept that it would be proper to resolve the ultimate question of sovereignty by referring it to the International Court?

Mr. Pym: The withdrawal of all the Argentine forces is the starting point from which everything else must flow. As I have said, I have an open mind about the way in which the long-term solution can, in due course, be achieved. I certainly do not rule out the International Court. Until now Argentina has been unwilling to let its case be heard at the International Court.

As we are in no doubt, and as no British Government have been in any doubt for about 150 years, about the status of the islands, it is up to those who think that they have a claim—contrary to the views of the British Government—to challenge the British Government's

[Mr. Pym]

claim. However, no one has yet done so. There was a period—I think under a Labour Government—when they put the case on the table at the International Court in the hope that that would bring the issue to a head, but the Argentines refused to play any part. Since then people have drawn the appropriate conclusions.

Mr. Frank Hooley (Sheffield, Heeley): Will the Foreign Secretary, while he is in the United States, think again about having some conversations with the Secretary-General of the United Nations? If we are relying, quite properly, on the Security Council's decision and on resolution 502, it is surely sensible to bring the Secretary-General into the conversations, at least informally.

Mr. Pym: From the United Nations' point of view, it is important to see that resolution 502 is carried out. I intend to spend the time in Washington, and I do not think that there will be time to fit in a visit to New York. However, I do not exclude any possibility, and I should make it clear that I am not in any way reluctant to talk to the Secretary-General. I am using my time in the way that is likely to be most effective and for the purpose that the House and I have in mind.

Mr. Michael Mates (Petersfield): With reference to the last part of the question put by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), will my right hon. Friend confirm that the last link in the chain of economic pressure on the Argentines rests with the United States of America? Although it is perfectly understandable that the United States of America has been reluctant to exert pressure while there was any hope of its continuing to act as a negotiator between the two sides, will my right hon. Friend make it clear to Mr. Haig when he visits the United States that at the very moment that the Americans feel that they can do nothing further we shall look to them to take that action quickly and effectively?

Mr. Pym: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I am acutely aware of that point. However, I made the position clear when I answered questions last Monday, and I have nothing further to add now.

Mr. David Stoddart (Swindon): Will the right hon. Gentleman make further representations to Mr. Haig and to the American Administration and perhaps get them to give a greater commitment to our side of the case? Will he warn the United States of America that any Fascist success in the Falkland Islands will give comfort and encouragement to Fascist throughout the world? For example, in Spain the Falangist movement organised a brazen demonstration only yesterday, which represents at least as great a threat to the democratic Government of Spain as it does to Gibraltar.

Mr. Pym: I have no doubt that the Administration of the United States of America are as keenly aware of the principles of democracy and representation as we are. It is not necessary, therefore, for me to carry that precise message. However, I am sure that the United States of America is keenly aware of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Alan Clark (Plymouth, Sutton): With regard to the longer term considerations that my right hon. Friend said might affect negotiations at some stage, will he confirm that there is no question of ceding our rights either to South Georgia or to the mineral and other resources of

the Antarctic, and that these are not dependent on the outcome of the negotiations on the Falkland Islands and will not be allowed to go by default?

Mr. Pym: We have never used any language or thought in terms of ceding what is without any question a British possession and a part of this country. We have always made that clear. Argentina is trying to take by force something that it has failed to achieve by peaceful means. We were negotiating with the Argentines in good faith, but they suddenly decided to break off negotiations and to invade. That position cannot be allowed to stand. However, if anyone wishes to challenge our claim to sovereignty, there are ways in which that can be done. The House and the world would like to see that happen, but it has not happened. Therefore, to enable that to happen, the first thing to do is to get the Argentine forces to withdraw.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Since sovereignty is bound to be transferred at some stage, and since it has been a matter of discussion for some years, would it not avoid an unnecessary confrontation if the interim Administration—once the Argentine forces had withdrawn—were to consist of the three flags—British, United Nations and Argentine?

Mr. Pym: I am afraid that I do not share the hon. Gentleman's view about the ultimate arrangement. He says that that will happen, but I do not say that. I shall not prejudice the final outcome, and I should not do so; it is none of my business. It must be negotiated and all the factors that we have discussed must be taken into account.

Mr. Churchill (Stretford): When my right hon. Friend visits Washington, will he make it clear, not only to the American Government but to the American people, that the nub of the crisis rests in the apparent determination of the Argentine military junta to ride roughshod over the wishes and liberties of the Falkland Islanders and to impose a neo-colonialist rule over those islands, which is unacceptable under the United Nations charter and to this House?

Mr. Pym: Yes, I will, but that is understood already. It is not only for the United States to understand that; it is for every other country to understand it. They have an interest in it, too.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline): Will the Foreign Secretary concede that, while the people of Britain are behind all the actions that he has taken so far, they will not wish anyone to be killed on either side unless and until all other means have been exhausted, including pressure by the United States, and by economic sanctions on the Argentine Government and State? Will the right hon. Gentleman take the opportunity when he is in Washington not only to press that on Secretary of State Haig but to arrange for a meeting with the President of the United States to put that point to him?

Mr. Pym: I am doing everything that I humanly can to try to achieve a peaceful settlement, but we have to be realistic because in an endeavour to uphold the freedom of peoples, to defend the liberty of peoples, it has at times, sadly, in history been necessary to resort to military means. Nobody wants that to happen, but we cannot exclude that possibility. But I will exclude it so long as negotiations are in play. We want to do everything we can to achieve a peaceful result. That is as far as I can go.

Mr. Healey: I wish to put again to the right hon. Gentleman a point with which I hope he has some sympathy. Most hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise that the first and best hope for the diplomatic solution to which the Government have pledged themselves is the success of the efforts of Secretary Haig. None of us would wish to do anything to prejudice the possibilities of that success. However, I hope that he will consider very seriously, as he has already expressed his view that any interim arrangements should not prejudice the outcome of negotiations for a permanent settlement in the islands, that the best possible interim arrangement would be one in which the United Nations accepted responsibility for administration. Will he discuss that possibility with Secretary Haig?

Mr. Pym: I want arrangements to be made in which the search for and the finding of the ultimate solution shall not be prejudiced in any way. That is what we want to try to achieve. A factor in achieving a peaceful settlement is the military pressure that we are applying as well as the diplomatic and economic measures that have been taken. The House must realise that. In the debates it has become

quite clear that the diplomatic, economic and military backing that we are giving to our efforts has an important part to play in the search for the settlement.

Later—

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the Foreign Secretary wishes to make a brief statement.

Mr. Pym: After the exchanges in the House just now, it was pointed out to me that I might in a supplementary answer have given a misleading reply.

The whole thrust of my answers throughout the exchanges was to demonstrate that I was using every endeavour—which indeed I am—to achieve a peaceful settlement but that, however regretably, the use of force could not be ruled out.

I understand that in my penultimate answer there may have been some misunderstanding about that and that I may have used words, which have not yet emerged from the *Hansard* typewriters, giving a different impression. If so, I wish to correct it, because I think that I made it clear throughout the exchanges that, however hard I was trying to achieve a peaceful settlement, the use of force could not at any stage be ruled out. If there was any misunderstanding, I want to clear it up.