

COVERING SECRET

NOTE TO PRESS OFFICERS

SOUTH GEORGIA/FALKLAND ISLANDS : 26 APRIL

Attached are the key documents available on Sunday night. Most questions are answered in Mr Nott's statement, the No 10 briefing notes, Mr Pym's message to his colleagues and the guidance telegrams, all attached. The following line to take may be helpful.

On the Record

There will be a statement in the House this afternoon which we cannot anticipate.

Following the unprovoked aggression by Argentine forces on 2 April, Security Council Resolution 502 imposed upon the Argentine Government the international legal obligation to withdraw. Argentine leaders have made clear that they have no such intention. Under the terms of the Resolution, we therefore have a clear right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter (we should dismiss contemptuously as wholly irrelevant ^{any argument} about who fired first at Grytviken; the Argentines fired first on 2 April).

In face of Argentine obduracy, we have made clear over the weeks our strategy of threefold pressure upon them - political, economic and military - to induce them to withdraw in accordance with the Resolution. Ministers have repeatedly stressed that we would not shrink from the use of force if necessary. The Argentines now know that we mean business. NB No fatal casualties.

Our commitment to the search for a diplomatic solution is undiminished. The use of force is not an alternative to diplomacy but - unhappily - a necessary element in it. It was clear that there was no hope of Argentine flexibility until they came to accept that we meant what we said.

We remain determined to do all we can to settle this issue without further use of force. We remain in close touch with

/Mr Haig

Mr Haig and hope that his untiring efforts will help to promote a solution.

Argentine withdrawal from the Falkland Islands remains our first objective - if possible by negotiation and if necessary by further action. We shall use no more force than is necessary to secure withdrawal.

Those who support us only so long as we abstain from force in self-defence are saying that aggression should be allowed to pay. Acceptance of the Argentine invasion will only encourage lawlessness elsewhere.

We are not formally at war with Argentina; we are using force in the exercise of self-defence under Article 51.

The issue is the right to self-determination of a peaceful population. It is not 'colonialism'. Indeed, it is the Argentines who are seeking to subject an established community to alien domination.

As the Prime Minister explained to the House last week, South Georgia is not part of the Falkland Islands but a separate British dependency, in recent years administered by the Governor at Port Stanley as a matter of convenience.

Did we warn Haig?

No-one can have been in any doubt from Mr Pym's statements in Washington and the Prime Minister's in London of the determination of HMG to use force if necessary. We are sure that Mr Haig understood this very well.

The Secretary of State to Brussels?

Yes. It is still Mr Pym's intention to be in Brussels tomorrow to attend a Council meeting on the Mandate (Mr Hurd is there already to cover Monday). No doubt this will provide an opportunity to keep his colleagues up-to-date on developments in the South Atlantic.

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Has Leith fallen too?

Yes, early this morning. British forces now in possession of South Georgia. Details from MOD.

News of 13 scientists plus 2 TV girls?

They were reported safe and well on Sunday. British forces are already in touch with some of them this morning.

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26 April 1982

Falkland Islands

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about recent developments in relation to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.

In our continuing pursuit of a negotiated settlement, my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary visited Washington on 22 and 23 April. He had many hours of intensive detailed discussion with Mr. Haig. Their talks proved constructive and helpful, but there are still considerable difficulties. Mr. Haig now intends to pursue his efforts further with the Argentine Government.

However, the Argentine Foreign Minister is reported to be unwilling to continue negotiations at present. I hope that he will reconsider this. As the British task force approaches closer to the Falklands, the urgent need is to speed up the negotiations, not to slow them down. We remain in close touch with Mr. Haig.

I now turn to events on South Georgia yesterday. The first phase of the operation to repossess the island began at first light when the Argentine submarine "Sante Fe" was detected close to British warships that were preparing to land forces on South Georgia.

The United Kingdom had already made it clear to Argentina that any approach on the part of Argentine warships, including submarines, or military aircraft which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of British forces would encounter the appropriate response. The "Sante Fe" posed a significant threat to the successful completion of the operation and to British warships and forces launching the landing. Helicopters therefore engaged and disabled the Argentine submarine.

Just after 4 pm London time yesterday, British troops landed on South Georgia and advanced towards Grytviken. At about 6 pm the commander of the Argentine forces in Grytviken surrendered, having offered only limited resistance.

British forces continued to advance during the night and are now in control of Leith, the other main settlement on South Georgia. At 10 o'clock this morning the officer commanding the Argentine forces on South Georgia formally surrendered.

British forces throughout the operation used the minimum force necessary to achieve a successful outcome. No British casualties have been notified and it is reported that only one Argentine sustained serious injuries. About 180 prisoners were taken, including up to 50 military reinforcements who had been on the Argentine submarine. The prisoners will be returned to Argentina.

British Antarctic survey personnel on the island were reported to be safe when we last heard from them early yesterday afternoon. Our forces are making contact with them and arrangements are in hand to evacuate them, if they so wish.

I am sure that the House will join me in congratulating our forces on carrying out this operation successfully, and recapturing the island. The action that we have taken is fully in accord with our inherent right of self-defence under article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Mr. right hon. Friends and I will continue to keep the House fully informed on the situation as it develops.

I should like to emphasise that the repossession of South Georgia, including the attack on the Argentine

submarine, in no way alters the Government's determination to do everything possible to achieve a negotiated solution to the present crisis. We seek the implementation of the Security Council resolution, and we seek it by peaceful means if possible.

Mr. Michael Food (Ebbw Vale): I am sure that the Prime Minister must appreciate that, along with other moods, there is a deepening sense of anxiety throughout the country and I trust that she and the Government will take account of it. I am sure that the whole country will be relieved to know that the South Georgia operation was carried through without loss of life on our side and without serious injury on either side.

We are entitled to stress to all concerned that the recovery of South Georgia was fully within our international rights. It was in no sense a breach of the charter, as some have falsely alleged. Indeed, it may help us in other areas, particularly in view of the extreme skill with which the operation was executed. Of course, the Falkland Islands and South Georgia are two very different propositions and I am sure that the House and the country understand that.

However, the most important and persistent question remains, and is indeed intensified. I put the question in the light of what the Prime Minister has said. How are we to pursue the search for the diplomatic and peaceful settlement to which she has referred? What is to happen next? The right hon. Lady spoke of speeding up the negotiations. What steps are the Government taking to speed up those negotiations?

What stage has Mr. Haig's mediation reached and what will happen if that mediation is not able to be pursued? A question that we have constantly asked throughout the discussions is reiterated in a notable leading article in today's *Financial Times*. Why have we so far refused to go back to the Security Council? Perhaps I should put the question in a way that the Prime Minister might prefer. When will we return to the Security Council on these matters? In the meantime, how are we to ensure—indeed, to be absolutely sure—that there will be no dangerous escalation of the crisis in any way?

What is the form of political control over military operations? In present circumstances that political control must be absolute and there must be no possibility of any mistakes whatever.

The Opposition remain firmly, unshakably and persistently committed to fresh initiatives in the search for a peaceful settlement. If one initiative fails another has to be started. Some Conservative Members are laughing, but the approach that I have outlined is the spirit in which the Government should be going about their business.

I retract nothing of what I have said about the charter and South Georgia, but let us take account of the fact that what is legal is not necessarily also prudent. That also has to be taken into account. The search for peace must never be torpedoed by us and I believe that the House can play a considerable part in ensuring that that spirit informs all our actions.

I ask the Prime Minister not merely to agree to report to the House consistently, but to give us much fuller reports than we have been given so far. There is still much to be reported to the House about the negotiations and the possible options. The best course would be for the right hon. Lady not only to agree to give reports over the next few days to the House, but to agree that there should be

a debate on Thursday. We on the Opposition Benches have a right to speak to these matters. We in the House of Commons should keep a persistent control over what the Government propose and intend. I ask the Prime Minister to accede to that request here and now.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks at the beginning of his intervention. I thank him especially for stressing that we had a right to retake and recapture South Georgia in accordance with the rules of the United Nations charter. I join the right hon. Gentleman in congratulating our forces on the professional skill with which they carried out their task. The right hon. Gentleman says that people are anxious. We share that anxiety in the search for a diplomatic settlement. More than three weeks have elapsed since the United Nations Security Council resolution was passed calling upon the Argentine forces to withdraw. During that time, far from withdrawing, the Argentine Government have put reinforcements of men, equipment, and materials on the island. If we have not yet reached a settlement, the blame lies at the feet of the Argentine Government.

We are naturally ready and anxious at any time to continue these negotiations. We have stayed constantly in touch with Mr. Haig. I hope that Mr. Costa Mendez will reconsider his decision not to see Mr. Haig and that he will see him shortly. If not, Mr. Haig can, of course, communicate with the Argentine Government in other ways.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the United Nations. It is, of course, the United Nations Security Council resolution that we want implemented. I do not think that there is any disposition in New York to involve the United Nations further while the negotiations with Mr. Haig are still continuing—[*Interruption*]. I am reporting what I believe to be the position at the United Nations in New York. I believe that most people there reckon that the best hope for a peaceful settlement is through the negotiations with Mr. Haig. I believe that we must continue those negotiations with all possible speed.

Of course we search for peace. We did not break the peace. We must remember that while we search for that peace our people—British people—are under the occupation of the Argentine invader. We must remember that in the way in which we carry out these negotiations.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for a debate. I hope that he will pursue this matter through the usual channels.

Mr. Foot: We shall certainly pursue the matter through the usual channels, but the right hon. Lady has some influence with the Leader of the House. After all, she has only just appointed him. We are entitled to have a debate this week especially in the light of the right hon. Lady's replies about what is to be done about getting the negotiations going. She devoted only one half sentence to that matter. "We are keeping in touch with Mr. Haig", was all that she said about the way in which we are making efforts to keep the negotiations going. I hope that the right hon. Lady will agree to the debate and give a much more responsive reply on that aspect of the matter.

The Prime Minister: I trust, nevertheless, that the right hon. Gentleman will pursue the matter through the usual channels.

As I think the right hon. Gentleman will understand, I cannot give him details of negotiations while they continue, but we pursue them as vigorously as possible.

After all, what we are asking for is the withdrawal of Argentine troops in accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolution.

Sir Derek Walker-Smith (Hertfordshire, East): Will my right hon. Friend clarify the position about the reference of this dispute to the International Court of Justice, a matter to which reference was made in a leading article in the *Financial Times*, and it was mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition, and also in *The Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph*? Can she say that, subject to the prior withdrawal of troops by Argentina in conformity with United Nations resolution 502, it is the Government's policy to suggest a reference of the dispute to the Court in accordance with the United Nations charter and the statute of the Court? If, unhappily, there should be a drift to war without any attempt at arbitration, which is so clearly envisaged in the charter, would not posterity marvel, and might it not condemn?

The Prime Minister: I believe that we referred the matter of the dependencies of the Falklands to the International Court of Justice in, I think I am right in saying, 1955. My right hon. and learned Friend will know that both parties have to agree to go to the International Court of Justice for it to adjudicate. We took the case to the Court, but the Argentines did not agree to the jurisdiction of the Court with regard to the dependencies. It is not through any lack of consent on our part that the case has not gone to the International Court of Justice.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I propose to allow 20 minutes for questions today as on previous days.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Is the Prime Minister aware that we on these Benches fully and equivocally support the decision to repossess South Georgia and congratulate all the Services and Service men, who have taken considerable risks? We are grateful for the fact that there has been no loss of life.

Will the right hon. Lady accept that many of us believe that it is right, with the Organisation of American States meeting in Washington today, to give Secretary of State Haig a few more days, but that the time is approaching when the United States, if it is unable to achieve movement, will have to make a decision to apply economic sanctions? Can the House be given some assurance that before any major escalation of violence took place the Prime Minister would be ready to go to the United Nations to discuss, under articles 82 and 83—these relate to strategic trust areas which would allow for British administration—the possibility of using those provisions for any interim administration?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said at the beginning of his remarks. With regard to the United Nations, it is, after all, the implementation of the United Nations resolution that we seek. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the United Nations is not in a position to implement the resolution itself. I repeat what I said to the Leader of the Opposition. I believe that it is right at the moment to continue through Mr. Haig to try to seek a peaceful settlement.

With regard to what the right hon. Gentleman said about the future course of negotiations as a whole, I must point out that time is getting extremely short as the task force approaches the islands. Three weeks have elapsed

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since the resolution. One cannot have a wide range of choice and a wide range of military options with the task force in the wild and stormy weathers of that area.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Runcorn): I returned from Washington this morning. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the overwhelming support that exists in America for the action that we are taking and the overwhelming understanding among many Members of Congress and others that the principle at stake is as important to America and the Western world as it is to this country?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. I believe that the American people know that unprovoked aggression must not be allowed to succeed. If it does, there will be no international law and many people will fear for their future.

Mr. Tony Benn (Bristol, South East): Is the Prime Minister aware that although the House and the country are united in condemning the aggression, public opinion, so far as it can be ascertained, favours a much more serious attempt at negotiation through the United Nations than has occurred, and that a majority of people would not follow the Government into a war with the Argentine, which would threaten the loss of many lives, including Service men and Falkland Islanders, which might spread the conflict and which would isolate this country? If the Prime Minister continues to underrate the importance of negotiation and proceeds with the war, the responsibility for the loss of life will rest upon her shoulders.

The Prime Minister: The Government lack no vigour or will to pursue negotiations. The lack is on the part of the Argentine Government to obey the Security Council resolution. In the meantime, perhaps the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) will remember that our people are under the heel of the Argentine invader.

Mr. John Peyton (Yeovil): Is the Prime Minister aware that few things could do more to bring support to the action that she and the Government are taking than the thoroughly mischievous question asked by the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn)?

Mr. Arthur Bottomley (Middlesbrough): What is the attitude to the Government's policy of Commonwealth countries in general and those in the West Indies area in particular?

The Prime Minister: Commonwealth countries have been most helpful in condemning the unprovoked aggression of the Argentine. Many of them have stopped imports from that country. New Zealand has also stopped exports. Mr. Fraser has sent a very strong message of support, to the United States Government.

As to the countries in the Caribbean area, Guyana in particular is a member of the Security Council and voted for United Nations resolution 502. There are many territorial disputes in the Caribbean, and many people realise that it is crucial to them that the Argentine should not succeed in its invasion of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness): Will the Prime Minister convey to the British forces who recaptured South Georgia the admiration of Liberal Members for the skill, courage and restraint that they demonstrated in that operation?

As the right hon. Lady has emphasised several times today that time is short, with all that that implies, does she realise that it will inevitably be increasingly difficult to give her a blank cheque without far more information? Has she further considered the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Party that there should be all-party discussions on the matter? Can she say more about economic sanctions, especially the supply of arms? Is it true that Israel is supplying ammunition to the Argentine?

The Prime Minister: The whole House admires what our forces have done, and I shall gladly send that message on behalf of the whole House.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's first point, time is indeed short. There is no lack of will on our part to negotiate. The trouble is in getting Argentina to withdraw. It may not be possible to achieve an Argentine withdrawal by negotiation, but that is what we are seeking. Argentina has had more than three weeks in which to comply with the Security Council resolution, but it has shown no inclination to do so. Indeed, it has reinforced its troops.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware of European sanctions and those taken by a number of Commonwealth countries. I am not in a position to say precisely what Israel has or has not supplied to the Argentine.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): I join other right hon. and hon. Members in congratulating the Armed Forces on the skill with which they liberated South Georgia. I also congratulate the Government on taking the decision to authorise that operation.

I welcome the decision to keep the door for negotiation open, but does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot keep the task force treading water indefinitely at the mercy of the Atlantic storms or the changing tides of political opinion? Does she agree that, having achieved a first success, we must, as soon as all preparations are ready proceed to the next stage as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. I am especially grateful to him for pointing out that time is short because of the weather conditions, the distance from home and because the task force is now approaching the islands. We must take account of that and do everything to speed up negotiations. I hope that that message will get through to the Argentine Government, because that is where it needs to go.

Mr. Douglas Jay (Battersea, North): Is it not clear that there will be a far better prospect of an acceptable negotiated settlement if, meanwhile, we fully exercise our unchallengeable rights of self-defence?

The Prime Minister: Yes; I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. We shall have greater chances of a peaceful settlement if we bring greater military pressure to bear on the Argentine Government.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Will my right hon. Friend emphasise that since the Government came to office they have done almost everything to attempt to negotiate a peaceful settlement between 1979 and the advent of hostilities and have continued with that approach since? Will she also emphasise that it is not us but the Argentine which has infringed not only the principle but also the letter of the United Nations charter and that it is infringing resolution 502? Does she agree that, although

recent events have been tragic, they have, nevertheless, shown that Britain has pursued the cause of peace throughout and that we are now defending our rights?

The Prime Minister: I confirm what my hon. Friend says. We are doing everything in accordance with the United Nations charter. We continue to seek a peaceful solution. If we are not successful, the fault will lie not with us or Mr. Haig, but fairly and squarely with the Argentine Government.

Mr. Eric Ogden (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the Prime Minister find time to give her attention to the problem of British Falkland Island citizens who are in the United Kingdom? Her Majesty's representatives, the governor, and the deputy governor—Mr. Baker—are in Britain, as are two elected representatives, John Cheek and John Luxton. They have had some support from the Foreign Office, but not very much. The Foreign Office has not yet found a home for the governor. He has not complained, but I do.

Will the right hon. Lady also consider the suggestion made by her hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and myself to the Foreign Office last October that a Falkland Islands secretariat or Government office should be established so that they would receive some support and not be dependent on the good will of the Foreign Office or the charity of the Falkland Island Office?

The Prime Minister: I shall examine the matter urgently. We are in touch with those people. If they need help, of course we must give it.

With regard to the Falkland Islanders still in the Falkland Islands, I have made it clear that if some of them wish to be evacuated temporarily and have not the means to do so, the Government will ensure that the necessary means are provided.

Sir John Eden (Bournemouth, West): Did not the Government make it clear from the outset that if Argentina would not be talked out of the Falkland Islands it would have to be fought out? Now that there can be no doubt about the determination and ability of Britain to take any necessary military action, will the Prime Minister ensure that in the continuing negotiations to secure observance of resolution 502 she will keep the initiative firmly in her hands?

The Prime Minister: We are trying constantly to take initiatives to ensure that the negotiations continue. We shall continue doing that. Only one thing needs to be done immediately under the Security Council resolution—the withdrawal of Argentine forces. After that, negotiations can continue. They have been going on for many years. As soon as the Argentine forces withdraw, we shall be prepared to start negotiations once again.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (West Lothian): As the runway at Port Stanley has been strengthened and lengthened to take Mirages, MiGs and Skyhawks, what are the consequences for air superiority and what will be the next action of the task force?

The Prime Minister: I do not wholly accept the premises upon which the hon. Gentleman's question is founded.

Mr. George Cunningham (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the right hon. Lady, both directly and through the United Nations, bring to the attention of the

Argentine Government their obligations under the fourth Geneva convention of 1949 with regard to not compelling Falkland Islanders to remain in those parts of the Falkland Islands that are particularly subject to combat danger?

The Prime Minister: I shall, of course, consider doing what the hon. Gentleman says. Many of the Falkland Islanders have left Port Stanley and gone out to the camp. There are far fewer in Port Stanley now than there were previously, but we shall certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Sir Bernard Braine (Essex, South-East): I am sure that in these circumstances it is right and humane to return prisoners of war to the Argentine, but will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that if any difficulty arises about this the names and state of health of such men will be made known to their anxious relatives—in sharp contrast to the inhumane treatment by the Fascist junta of the relatives of thousands of Argentines who have disappeared in recent years and many of whom are now dead?

The Prime Minister: I should make one point clear. These are not prisoners of war. A state of war does not exist between ourselves and the Argentine. They are prisoners, and they will be returned as soon as possible. We shall, of course, let their names and state of health be known to their relatives as soon as possible. I understand that the commander of the Argentine forces on the island is already grateful for the prompt medical attention that was given to the one Argentine marine who was badly hurt.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does the Prime Minister agree that now is the time for resolution and for her to earn the soubriquet of the Iron Lady by standing firm against the wild voices calling for an increase in violence and a drift to war? Does she agree that neither Britain nor the Argentine can benefit from a war? Will she emphasise that we shall seek a negotiated settlement and that, if that requires economic force, we shall use economic force and economic sanctions and, indeed, every sanction short of war, because war would be disastrous?

The Prime Minister: First, a number of countries have joined us in imposing economic sanctions. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, such sanctions are slow to operate and tend not to be wholly successful as there is a good deal of leakage through third countries. Secondly, I agree that resolution is required—resolution to ensure that unprovoked aggression does not succeed.

Sir Nigel Fisher (Surbiton): Despite the comments of my right hon. Friend about economic sanctions, may I revert to the point made by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). Mr. Haig's valiant efforts to mediate have now apparently ended for the time being by the decision of the Argentine Foreign Minister, will my right hon. friend reconsider the position and suggest to the United States Government that it might now be appropriate for them to impose economic sanctions against the Argentine, if only to show which side they are on?

The Prime Minister: I understand the feelings of my hon. Friend and of many right hon. and hon. Members on this matter. Such economic sanctions would be of a kind and a degree perhaps greater than any other that could be brought to bear. I understand, however, that Mr. Haig

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believes that the meeting with Costa Mendez has only been postponed and will take place. Even if it does not, there are means of contacting and negotiating with the Argentine junta direct.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Waltham Forest): Why must the pace of negotiations be dictated by the requirements of military strategy in the South Atlantic, when our priorities should surely be the other way round?

The Prime Minister: The pace of negotiations has been very swift. When one has a task force such as we have in the wild and stormy weathers of the South Atlantic, that is a limiting factor on possible military activities which any sensible Government must take into account.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that her handling of this crisis has the support of the vast majority of the people of this country? Does she agree that it is important to continue to follow the policy of the stick and the carrot—the stick to ensure that aggression pays no dividends and the carrot to show that we have no quarrel with the Argentine people, but only with the illegal actions of their Government?

The Prime Minister: I accept that negotiations are more likely to succeed if military pressure is kept up. One must always consider the military options, and in doing so we must look after our soldiers and Marines who have to undertake them.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that we shall be returning to this subject during the week.

British Rail, Shildon

4.6 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 9, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announced closure of the British Rail engineering works at Shildon, Co. Durham, throwing 2,500 mostly skilled men on to the dole in a town of only 14,000 in which the unemployment rate is already well above the national average."

Shildon produced almost £800,000 of the £1.3 million profit of British Rail Engineering Ltd. last year. The previous managing director of BREL described it as the most efficient wagon works in Europe. Industrial relations have been excellent for many years. The men have co-operated fully in the cost cutting and new working practices to keep their products internationally competitive. Their reward for co-operation has been a hefty kick in the teeth.

Shildon was a birthplace of railways 150 years ago. Timothy Hackworth, who opened the works, was a great rival of George Stephenson, and the first railway in the world ran through Shildon. Four or five generations have given their lives to the works. In any family in Shildon, one will find more commitment to railways than in the entire British Rail Board. Yet no task force will be dispatched to preserve Shildon's way of life. No cash limit free, £275 million operation will be mounted to rescue Shildon from disaster. No bravely baying public-school cultivated voice from the Government Benches will be raised to acclaim the paramountcy of Shildon people's wishes.

This decision is as bad for Shildon as was the closing of the steelworks for Consett. The people of Shildon are shocked, stunned and disbelieving. What can the future hold now for them and their families? The Government and British Rail must recognise the social catastrophe that they are inflicting on this long-suffering Durham community, where the people embrace the solid working-class values of hard work, thrift, sturdy independence and self-help that the Price Minister purports to admire.

Mr. Speaker: The hon Member gave me notice before 12 o'clock midday that he would seek to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announced closure of the British Rail engineering works at Shildon, Co. Durham, throwing 2,500 mostly skilled men on to the dole in a town of only 14,000 in which the unemployment rate is already well above the national average."

The House knows that it is always difficult for me when applications are made for emergency debates on the closure of factories. On this occasion I must tell the House that I was in the locality of the works at the weekend. Therefore, it is all the more difficult for me to explain that it is not in my power to decide whether this matter is to be debated. I merely have the right to decide whether we must change our business tonight or tomorrow night for an emergency debate on the proposed action.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I listened to him with sympathetic concern. However, I have to rule that his submission does not fall within the provisions of the Standing Order, and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.