

Lord SHACKLETON

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From the Private Secretary

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23 March 1988

The Prime Minister has seen the attached letter of 22 March from Lord Shackleton. She wishes to send a reply after the debate in the Lords on 30 March, and I should be most grateful if you could supply a draft for this purpose by Wednesday 6 April.

PAUL GRAY

Peter Smith, Esq.
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office

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10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Lord Stuckleton has been
at pains to request that
you should see this letter
personally before the 30 March
Lords debate. I see nothing
in it to change earlier views
and decisions. If you are
content, we will let you
have a reply after 30 March.

Yes

Thank you

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COMMITTEE OFFICE
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22nd March, 1988

Dear Prime Minister

SPACE

I appreciate that a number of colleagues from both Houses have been in touch with you about the United Kingdom's space policy. As Chairman of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee I feel bound to make a further plea against an increasingly tight timetable for decisions on international programmes, if we are not to lose out on long-term space developments. I know it is argued that we can come back at a time to suit ourselves, but from my contacts with the European Space Agency and other members of the international space community in the last few days, I believe this to be untrue.

Two deadlines for major decisions are imminent. By 31 March we have to decide whether to join the Canadians in RADARSAT, and by mid-April whether to join ESA and the Americans in the Polar Platform. Within existing levels of expenditure it is possible to join at least one of these programmes. For a marginal increase we could join both. I shall be arguing this course of action in the House of Lords debate on 30 March and so will others. If we fail to join, British industry's contribution to RADARSAT will go to the Americans and its contribution to the Polar Platform will probably go to the French.

The Government has consistently expressed its interest in earth observation and the Committee strongly endorse this. It is the next area of space exploitation likely to become commercial, and we must not forget its value for defence - for instance in the Falklands. Future development requires the creation of a market for data which end-users will pay for. This in turn depends on continuity of satellite data, sufficient to attract new value-added industries and users. Because of the technological and commercial risks in launching satellites and the long time frame for profitability, the initial investment inevitably relies on the public sector for support, and the public sector are among the main users. RADARSAT in 1994 and the Polar Platform in about 1998 offer exactly the sequence of satellites which is needed. Last week's decision by the French to block the ERS-2 satellite (in

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the interests of their domestic space industry) reinforces this need. What is more the Polar Platform would get us into the Columbus programme and give us access to the Space Station. This is an optional programme which the United Kingdom Government "welcomed and endorsed" in Rome in 1985.

Since David Young will be replying to the debate on 30 March, I am copying this letter to him. Other aspects of space policy will of course also be raised then.

*I hope you will excuse me
for approaching you personally.*

Yours sincerely

Eddie Shackleton

SHACKLETON

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP,
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