

PRESS OFFICE BULLETIN

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FALKLANDS

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS ON WHEN WE FIRST KNEW

Attached are extracts from a number of Ministerial Statements set out in chronological order. It was not until Wednesday, 31 March, that HMG learnt that the Argies were heading for the Falklands.

Points to Make

1. The PM made it quite clear to the House at Question Time yesterday (Tuesday 6 April) that although we were aware that Argentine ships were in the area it was not until Wednesday 31 March that we knew they were heading for the Falklands.
2. The PM's Statement above in no way conflicts with what Mr Luce said on 4 April or the LPS (Mr Atkins) Statement on 2 April.
3. ^(ONLY IF RAISED) There is no inconsistency between the above and what Mr Nott said at his press conference on 2 April. He said "Last night (ie. Thursday 1 April) clear evidence became available for the first time that the Argentinian naval forces were preparing for the assault of the Falklands". It was on Wednesday 31 March that we received information that ships were heading for Port Stanley. On Thursday 1 April further evidence made it clear, as Mr Nott said, that the Argentinian force was preparing for an assault.
4. Lord Carrington in his Panorama interview on 5 April stated that the Argentinians did not actually make up their minds to invade until Monday 29 March. However we did not have this information until later (ie. after 31 March).
5. Obviously we were receiving intelligence about Argentinian movements before Wednesday 31 March and these were being considered by Ministers including the PM and Lord Carrington as reported by the D/Mail. However these reports were not conclusive and stopped short of suggesting an invasion.
6. Although the task force was put on immediate notice for operations following Mr Nott's Statement at the Press Conference on Friday 2 April, he also said a substantial number of ships had been at sea for some period of time. The PM also alluded to this in the House yesterday when she said that we took certain dispositions when we learnt that the Argentinians would intervene by force if we took off the men at South Georgia.

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FALKLAND ISLANDS

- 19 March First report of Argentine vessel in Leith Harbour and party of about 60 Argentines setting up camp.
- 22 March FCO News Department statement. We/FCO/MoD state unattributably that HMS Endurance in Falkland Island waters.
- 23 March Luce Statement in the Commons: "HMS Endurance is in the area and is in a position to help if necessary. As for the future security and defence of the area, I must give a firm assurance that it is the duty of this Government and of any British Government to defend and support the islanders to the best of their ability. The deployment of a defence force and the type of force that it should be are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence."
- 27/28 March Press reports of Argentinian ships and submarines exercising.
- 30 March Luce Statement in the Commons: "HMS Endurance standing by at South Georgia. Meanwhile the question of security in the Falkland area is being reviewed, although the House will understand that I prefer to say nothing in public about our precautionary measures. I can however inform the House that HMS Endurance will remain on station as long as is necessary."
- Press reports that a British nuclear powered submarine, HMS Superb, together with a RFA heading for the area.
- 1 April Emergency meeting of the Security Council.
- 2 April (Invasion)

LPS Statement in the Commons: "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. The House will not expect me to give details at this stage of the military steps we have taken to respond to the worsening situation.

"The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the Government misjudged the situation. The answer is 'No'. It has become increasingly evident over the past few days that the Argentine had assembled a fleet which was operating in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands. We have responded in the appropriate way, and I believe that taking the matter to the United Nations was the proper course. I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's support in that."

Press Conference

Mr Nott: "Earlier this week we became aware of substantial Argentine naval exercises, which subsequently came to include an Amphibious group, and later in the week we obtained clarification that the exercise location was moving towards the Falkland Islands. Although the Argentine fleet was still on naval exercises we deliberately avoided an obvious military response so as to avoid precipitating the very incident which we were seeking to avoid by diplomatic means - at least until we had knowledge that a threat to the Falkland Islands was contemplated."

"Last night clear evidence became available for the first time that the Argentine naval force were preparing for the assault of the Falkland Islands. The Royal Navy was straight away put on immediate notice for operations - and a substantial task force is being prepared.

"Nevertheless I can disclose that we have had a substantial number of Royal Navy ships at sea for some period of time. I cannot however reveal their position. Arrangements were also made some time ago for reprovisioning and refuelling support to move to the S. Atlantic.

"I am not able to give any further details of the military preparations which we have made - or any other details of force movements."

3 April

PM's Statement in the Commons (contains a very full account of the sequence of events - copy attached): "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, destroyer, 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."

4 April

Luce interview: "I must repeat that there was no evidence three or four weeks ago - which is what is being suggested by so many people - that there was a sudden and new development which posed a military threat.

"Well, you know, let me say this. It was only after the beginning of the South Georgia dispute a fortnight or so ago that we began to get indications that perhaps the Argentine Government or elements in the Argentine Government, particularly in the armed forces, wanted to use this occasion opportunisticly to their advantage. And it was only after that that the first indications began to emerge and, in fact, very much more recently, as far as our information is concerned that they wanted to resort to the form of military action. And I must say this, that even a fortnight ago, when it wasn't clear that they wanted to take action of that nature ... Even had we known them, we could not have got a fleet there or a deterrent force of some kind there in time to deal with it."

5 April

Lord Carrington's interview for Panorama: "If I may tell you something, our assessment of it is that they didn't actually make up their minds to do this until about 29 March. It may very well be, of course, that the troops were loaded up. But these Argentinian exercises take place very regularly. They were a very long way away. It was only at that time they turned to the Falkland Islands."

6 April

PM's Question Time: "I therefore stand by what I told the Rt Hon Gentleman on Saturday: the first time we had precise information. If the Rt Hon Gentleman looks into that he will see that there is a phrase to the effect that they knew there were ships, they did not know their intent. I am telling the Rt Hon Gentleman with the greatest possible accuracy as information came to me. The first information which I had was on Wednesday of last week, when we took action. Previously we had been very worried about the situation in South Georgia where Endurance had been and it was suggested that she take off the Argentinians by force and we had understood that there were ships on the way for that and when we understood that, we also took certain dispositions."

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 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. 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 "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 quite 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 right hon. Lady's 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 cynical 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 very likely 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 changes—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 sea. 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 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 naturally and naturally look to us for protection. So far, they have been betrayed. The responsibility for the betrayals rests with the Government. The Government must now atone 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 is 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 our 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.

money go to British Leyland, it should raise what money it can by selling any parts of the group that people are prepared to buy?

The Prime Minister: There is a view that the company should continue some of its policy of selling assets in order to provide capital from internal sources.

President Reagan

Q2. Mr. Cryer asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the progress of Her Majesty's Government's arrangements for the visit to the United Kingdom of President Reagan.

The Prime Minister: President Reagan is to be the guest of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle. As was announced on 25 March, he is to be invited to address Members of both Houses of Parliament in the Royal Gallery. The programme is still under discussion and further details will be announced when it has been approved.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Prime Minister accept that her attempt to use the visit of President Reagan to shore up her failing position is widely regarded as an abuse of the House? Has she noted that even President Reagan has called for a peaceful solution to the Falkland Islands crisis, without bloodshed? Does she not accept that, as she is responsible in the final analysis for the conduct of her Government, she should consider an early resignation and allow someone else to meet President Reagan on his visit?

The Prime Minister: We shall welcome President Reagan as the President of our senior NATO ally, the most powerful defender of liberty in the West and throughout the world. I understand that President Reagan, like most of us, would wish a peaceful solution to the crisis in the Falkland Islands. We shall be happy if anyone is able to secure the withdrawal of the Argentinians from the Falkland Islands, the restoration of British sovereignty and the respecting of the wishes of the people to live under sovereignty without a drop of blood being shed. If anyone can do that, we shall warmly welcome their co-operation. With regard to resignation—No. Now is the time for strength and resolution.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: While warmly welcoming what my right hon. Friend has said, the personal charge that she is taking over these affairs and all that President Reagan can do to help bring about restoration of British sovereignty in the Falkland Islands, may I ask whether my right hon. Friend—and all of us—should not keep in mind in this difficult matter the prayer by Sir Francis Drake that she and many of us heard yesterday in Westminster Abbey?

The Prime Minister: I think that the prayer to which my right hon. Friend must be referring is:

"There must be a beginning of any matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory." That is an apt quotation under the circumstances.

Engagements

3. Mr. John Browne asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept, with regard to her action over the Falkland Islands issue, that she has the overwhelming support of the House and the nation? Can she confirm whether our mission is to destroy the Argentine invasion fleet? If my right hon. Friend cannot confirm that, would she say whether she believes it either possible or desirable in the long term security interests of the Falkland Islands, and to protect the exposed southern flank of NATO, that a NATO base should be established in the Falkland Islands?

The Prime Minister: Our mission is to restore British sovereignty to the islands and to give the people what they want—the right to live under British rule and to owe allegiance to the British Crown. That is our task. I do not think that the idea of a NATO base in the Falkland Islands would be well received because the islands are far out of the NATO area.

Mr. Foot: Has the right hon. Lady been able to study this morning the reports in many newspapers such as *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* that the information about the attack was known in London 10 days before the invasion? Is the right hon. Lady aware that this is claimed to be on unimpeachable sources and that, if that was true, it would have been possible for action of interception to have been taken? Will the right hon. Lady say whether that information is correct and if it was received, what action was taken by the Government?

The Prime Minister: There are two points that need to be made. I told the House on Saturday that even if action had been taken—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] Will the House let me answer the question in my own way, giving information that I am certain is accurate, as I try to do and try to check these matters?

As I told the House on Saturday, even had we known at the time of 19 March, when there was the landing at South Georgia at Leith—which is a long time before the 11 days to which the right hon. Gentleman was referring—we could not have got ships of the fleet there in time.

With regard to the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, I think that he will find a certain amount of confusion in the reports. I therefore stand by what I told the right hon. Gentleman on Saturday—that the first time we had precise information was on Wednesday. If the right hon. Gentleman looks at his copy of *The Times*, he will see that there is a phrase to the effect that they knew there were ships but did not know their intent. [Interruption.] I am telling the right hon. Gentleman with the greatest possible accuracy, as information came to me.

The first information that I had was on Wednesday of last week, when we took action. Previously, we had been very worried about the situation in South Georgia, where HMS "Endurance" had been, and it was suggested that she take off the Argentinians by force. We had understood that there were ships on the way for that and when we understood that we also took certain dispositions.

Mr. Foot: Will the right hon. Lady now answer the immediate point that I put to her? Questions of British intelligence are concerned in these matters and the House

has the right to judge whether British intelligence was operating properly and if so what action was taken. Can the right hon. Lady now tell us whether the information stated in these reports was received? Whenever she may have been informed, surely she has had the chance to look at such accusations today and can tell the House and the country whether such information as this was received at the time stated.

The Prime Minister: I have tried to help the right hon. Gentleman. I think, if he looks at the report on the front of *The Times* he will find that it says that there were ships in the area but their intent was not known. [Hon. Members: "Oh."] That is what I understand *The Times* to say. We knew there were problems and of course we were dealing with them on South Georgia. The precise time that we had information that it was an invasion fleet and that it was on its way was Wednesday evening. We took action then. [Interruption.] I am trying to give the right hon. Gentleman accurate information. Previously, because of the situation in South Georgia, we had also made certain other dispositions.

Mr. Foot: If the right hon. Lady cannot give us and the country an accurate answer on the matter now, will she study the matter further and make another statement to the House tomorrow, as many of her Ministers have had to do before?

Mr. Ashton: Come clean.

The Prime Minister: I have given the accurate information—[Interruption.]—that I myself know and the action that I myself took at the time when I received it.

Sir Paul Bryan: Is not my right hon. Friend encouraged by the support that the country has received at the United Nations and throughout the free world for the stand that her Government have taken on the Falkland Islands?

The Prime Minister: Yes. There was a forceful resolution moved at the United Nations Security Council calling upon the Argentines to withdraw and we received support in the vote that was passed from the United States, France, Ireland, Japan, Zaire, Togo, Uganda, Guyana and Jordan. Those were the countries that voted for us. The Soviet Union, China, Poland and Spain abstained and Panama voted against.

Mr. David Steel: Did the Prime Minister hear the interview at the weekend with the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce) before he resigned as Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office? In that he said quite clearly—and I heard the interview—that the Government had no warning of any attack or threat to the Falkland Islands until about a fortnight ago. A fortnight is a great difference from 48 hours or 24 hours. Will the right hon. Lady try to clear this matter up?

The Prime Minister: As I have been trying to indicate, there were problems, as the right hon. Gentleman knew, on South Georgia. The problems there were that if HMS "Endurance" proceeded to take off the 10 Argentines who had landed at Leith and who refused to leave although they did not have proper immigration papers—[Interruption.] We were in touch with Buenos Aires and we said that the

men must go or get the proper clearance to be on our territory. We knew that there was a threat that if we took them off by force HMS "Endurance" might well have been stopped, and that there were ships about that could do the stopping.

The precise nature of the threat to Port Stanley and to that part of the Falkland Islands came to me, as I told the right hon. Gentleman, on Wednesday. I do not believe that there was a precise threat to Port Stanley as long before as the right hon. Gentleman indicated.

Mr. Higgins: As the United Nations Security Council resolution on the Falkland Islands is mandatory and the Argentine Government have not complied with it, will my right hon. Friend consider tabling a further resolution enforcing economic sanctions on the Argentine Government?

The Prime Minister: I think that if we were to table a further resolution about economic sanctions we should not have quite such a successful conclusion as we had to the resolution that we have already tabled.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Prime Minister consider the consequences of the Government's mishandling of the Falklands crisis for quite a number of my constituents? Is she aware that 50 per cent. of the trade with Argentina goes through Liverpool docks, and that that trade is likely to stop as a result of military action or sanctions, which I would support? If that trade is stopped, will the right hon. Lady make sure that Merseyside docks, which are already in a state of crisis, receive Government assistance to compensate, so that unemployment does not increase as a result of the mishandling of the Falklands crisis by this Government?

The Prime Minister: The extent of our exports to Argentina is, and has been, comparatively small in relation to our total exports. Therefore, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the answer that he seeks. However, I can tell him, as a matter of information, that we have decided to impose an embargo on the imports of all goods from Argentina from midnight tonight.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Winnick: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the exceptional circumstances of a national crisis, as this undoubtedly is, can I ask you to give careful consideration to extending Prime Minister's Question Time, because it is the only way that hon. Members have—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not decide the length of Prime Minister's Question Time.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, proceeding on the motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer relating to the Commitment of the Finance Bill shall not be subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 40(3) and may be proceeded with, though opposed, for a period of three-quarters of an hour after Ten o'clock or for three-quarters of an hour after they have been entered upon, whichever is the later, and that at the end of that period Mr. Speaker shall put any Question necessary to dispose of those proceedings.—[Mr. Thompson.]