

US Declassified



THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

December 8, 1983

The Right Honorable Margaret Thatcher
Prime Minister
London, England

h.a.
AB $\frac{22}{12}$

Dear Madame Prime Minister:

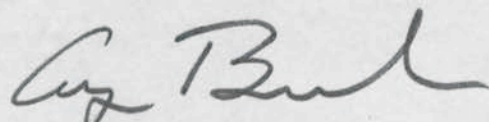
Before leaving for Argentina, I want to send a few thoughts to you. Oliver Wright came in to see me on Tuesday, just before his departure for London. We had a very good talk about the overall relationship and I made clear to Oliver my desire to help in any way to deal with matters of mutual concern.

Since that meeting, I have read your most forthcoming response to President Reagan's letter about our certification of Argentina. I am also aware that you have sent a message to President-elect Alfonsin congratulating him and the people of Argentina on the restoration of democracy in that country. I will do all I can to help the Argentines understand your interest in restoring relations between Buenos Aires and London without having such restoration be dependent upon discussion of the Falkland Islands sovereignty issue.

I am concerned about recent events and am determined to do all I can to be helpful. Upon my return from Argentina, we will make certain that Sir Oliver is fully briefed on pertinent developments that took place during that trip.

I wish we could sit down and chat because I have been troubled by recent tensions and I know it hasn't been easy for you either.

Respectfully,


George Bush

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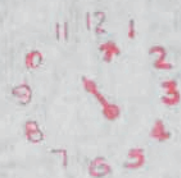
Respectfully,

George Bush

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18 DEC 1983



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
LONDON

December 9, 1983

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Dear Prime Minister:

I have been asked to deliver the enclosed message to you from Vice President Bush, which was received at the Embassy this evening.

Sincerely,

Charles H Price II
Charles H. Price, II
Ambassador
by [Signature]

Enclosure

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London, S.W.1.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

12 December 1983

ARGENTINA

I enclose a copy of a message to the Prime Minister from the US Vice President which was received at No. 10 Downing Street over the weekend.

I expect that Sir Oliver Wright told the Department, following his call on the Prime Minister last week, that Mrs. Thatcher much welcomes the idea put to her by Sir Oliver Wright that Vice President Bush should visit London early in 1984. The last paragraph of Mr. Bush's message may provide an opportunity to take up this suggestion - though I was under the impression that Sir Oliver would be conveying orally to the Vice President the Prime Minister's positive response to the suggested visit. Perhaps therefore you could be in touch with the Embassy in Washington before recommending a draft reply to Mr. Bush from the Prime Minister.

A. J. COLES

Brian Fall Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

CONFIDENTIAL

LOBBY NOTE

copied to me.
sent at 6.45 pm.

Dec 8, 1983

JW.

US HUMAN RIGHTS CERTIFICATION OF ARGENTINA

The US Administration have announced that they have re-certified* Argentina as a potential purchaser of US arms. BUT this does not mean that arms' sales are either in the pipeline or planned in any way. Each case will be considered on its merits but there is no longer an automatic bar to consideration of arms' sales.

The Prime Minister made our position very clear to President Reagan in September and the US Administration is very well aware of our concern and we have been kept closely informed of their thinking on this subject. We have been glad to note that Weinberger has remarked that the USA would exercise caution about the resumption of major new supplies and that they would not supply weapons which could be used in a new attempt to invade the Falkland Islands.

Certification is not equivalent to arms' sales. An amendment in 1978 to the US Foreign Assistance Act placed a ban on most arms' sales to Argentina. Only when the Administration certifies that the Argentine authorities have made significant progress on human rights and that the resumption of arms' sales is in the United States' interests can they be resumed. The Administration have now judged that the situation in Argentina meets this test in US Law of human rights' performance. Like the President, we have noted and welcomed the restoration of democracy in Argentina and other progress there on human rights.

Certification opens the way for arms' supplies but the Argentine Foreign Minister-Designate has said that buying arms is not one of the priorities of the new Government and we understand that the Americans for their part do not envisage major transactions.

We shall obviously remain in contact with the US Administration on this subject.

Press Office
10 Downing Street

8 December 1983

*effective from 10 December 1983

[Ms. Harman]

ruling. However, in the summer of last year the European Court said that the Government were failing in their equality legislation and the Government still have not remedied that position.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for a telling analogy of the Government's attitude. The Government have deliberately sought to bring in the minimum provisions that they could get away with on equal pay for work of equal value. We have had a sorry tale of regulations being introduced and then being withdrawn. In the other place, regulations were produced in October, mysteriously withdrawn, and they reappeared in December as the deadline of the end of the year marched relentlessly forward. The way in which the Government have approached this matter shows that they are simply dragging their feet on well-known commitments that they ought to be putting into force.

Clause 8 offers the Government a way out. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking has been helpful in bringing forward that provision because it allows the Government to escape from the problem and to conform to the requirements of the European Court.

There are other important matters in the Bill that are of current concern, including the problem of part-time employment which is becoming an increasing feature of our labour market. There are 800,000 more people in part-time employment than 10 years ago. It is important that legislation is put in place to ensure that those people are properly protected. In a recent paper to the National Economic Development Council the Chancellor of the Exchequer drew attention to the increase in part-time employment. He talked ominously about the need for real wages to be made more responsive to conditions in the labour market. That has alerted many people to the need to ensure that part-time workers are properly protected, and the Bill offers us such an opportunity.

The community faces another major problem with homeworkers because low pay is endemic among them. The Bill takes a major step to eradicate that exploitation. I hope that we shall receive a more considered reply on measures relating to part-time employment and homeworkers than the Government have given so far. It is not good enough for the Government merely to say that some changes will cost more. That argument could have been put to Lord Shaftesbury when he was trying to stop people being forced to climb chimneys. Every time we make such an advance, some cost will be involved. The cost must be evaluated in terms of the community's social objectives, the improvement in our standards of life, and the raising of the standards that we as a community want to see observed by employers. I hope that the Minister will give a much more considered reply on these matters.

The Opposition support the Bill. We have shown that the Government response is totally inadequate. Hiding behind technicalities will not stop the progress of this legislation. If it is defeated today, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking and others will ensure that it is brought back time and again for urgent consideration by the House.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).

Argentina (Arms Purchases)

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that I raised a point of order at 9.35 am. I was told at 10 am that a private notice question had not been allowed. I am at a loss to understand how a private notice question can be disallowed when a Government statement is now to be made.

Mr. Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, matters about private notice questions are not normally raised with the Speaker. The usual time for announcements of these matters and of statements is after 10 o'clock, not at 9.30.

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ray Whitney): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the United States certification of and possible arms sales to Argentina. I apologise to the Opposition for not being able to let them have an earlier advance copy of the statement, due to circumstances of which I believe they are aware.

President Reagan's decision, announced yesterday, was not sprung upon us. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House told the House on 22 November, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made our position very clear to President Reagan when she saw him in September and the Americans have kept us closely informed. Their certification under United States law that Argentina has made significant progress in human rights is not equivalent to arms sales. Like the President, we have noted and welcomed the restoration of democracy in Argentina and other progress there on human rights.

Arms purchases are not one of the priorities of the incoming Government of Argentina. We have been glad to note the public assurance by the United States Defence Secretary that the United States Administration will exercise caution about the resumption of major new supplies to Argentina and will not supply weapons which could be used to attempt a new invasion of the Falklands.

We shall remain in contact with the United States Administration on this subject.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I thank the hon. Gentleman for responding so quickly to our urgent appeal for a statement in the House. I also welcome the very moderate and sensible tone of his statement today, which was in striking contrast with the excited rhetoric of the Prime Minister a few weeks ago when she talked of betrayal and outrage. Coming from her, such complaints were difficult to understand, as in the summer she had herself authorised British firms to supply vital equipment for German warships, knowing that they were to be sold to Argentina. She also authorised the sale of heavy water to Germany, knowing that it would be on sale to Argentina for the manufacture of nuclear materials suitable for weapons, although the Argentine Government had not—and still have not—accepted international safeguards in relation to their nuclear processes.

I also welcome the Minister's recognition that Mr. Alfonsín has no intention of wasting his country's money on armaments unless he is compelled to do so. The only threat that he now faces is from Chile, which is ruled by a dictatorship even less agreeable than the Argentine junta but to which, as we were told yesterday, the British

commission a report from an independent expert. But there is a fundamental difference between the two officers. Under the new regulations the expert is to be a person designated by ACAS, and independent body which has no possible partisan interest in the proceedings.

According to the Bill, the equality officer will be an employee of the Equal Opportunities Commission. But the Bill also provides for that same commission to assist a claimant and even handle her case before the tribunal. The commission's sense of integrity would of course, in practice, guarantee that there would be no conflict of interest. But surely it is unreasonable to expect a respondent to feel sanguine at having his case determined on the evidence of an official of the organisation supporting those who are claiming against him. I believe that this provision would be considered neither fair nor reasonable by employers.

The Equal Opportunities Commission has a statutory duty to review the working of the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts. I know that the commission intends to bring forward proposals for amendment in the latter half of next year, and we shall consider them most carefully.

It would have been interesting to hear the commission's views on the Bill. I know that it wanted to comment but was unable to do so in the short time available since the Bill's publication. I take this opportunity to record our appreciation of the constructive and sensible comments made by the commission during our consultations on the equal pay amendment regulations and the accompanying tribunal procedure regulations, which were largely altered in the light of the commission's recommendations.

The commission has a key role in assisting in the development of equal opportunity policies through legislative change where appropriate and its many initiatives, such as the important Women into Science and Engineering Year which is to be commended for its valuable and practical approach to the serious issue of tackling the under-representation of girls and women in engineering. That point was made by the hon. Lady when she referred to the fact that very few girls do physics and mathematics courses of an advanced nature. As the hon. Lady probably knows, I have signed a number of designations under section 47 designating courses that are exclusively for women and girls.

I am sure that the House will understand that in my opening remarks I have not been able to deal with more than a few of the Bill's main provisions. There is scope for a lengthy critique on important but complex issues, such as indirect discrimination and the concept of the hypothetical man. Other right hon. and hon. Members may wish to develop that point.

I emphasise that, although the Government remain firmly committed to equal opportunities, many of the Bill's specific proposals are fundamentally misconceived and taken together, we have no option but to oppose them. Some proposals, such as those on maternity and paternity leave, would place unacceptable administrative burdens on employers and jeopardise the prospects for both men and women. Other proposals, such as the provisions on single sex recruitment, would surely have unintended ill-effects.

Even more importantly, I remind the House that a number of the Bill's provisions go well beyond what I believe public opinion is prepared to support in this sensitive field of legislation. I said that the Bill was monumental and certainly, whatever its effect, it will be

a monument to the industry and single-mindedness of the author and those who have assisted her. None the less, I believe that the Bill is impracticable, expensive and in many respects alien to public opinion, and I must urge the House to reject it.

10.53 am

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): The Labour party give the Bill their total support. I wish to say how inadequate we found the reply of the Under-Secretary of State. It is typical of Ministers who are frightened to argue the principles that lie behind the Bill that they take refuge in pettifogging, legalistic criticisms, such as those to which we have just listened.

I can speak briefly because of the eloquent way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) introduced the measure. Our commitment to the Bill's sentiments pre-dates the hon. Lady's Opposition Front Bench responsibility, but her speech today amply demonstrated the wisdom of her appointment to those responsibilities.

The principle that lies behind the Bill—I hope that the House will not forget it—is that discrimination based on sex and sexuality is wrong. That is the first point that we wish to make in support of the Bill. Secondly, the plain fact is that the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 have been shown to suffer from important defects, such as those outlined by the hon. Lady. Those were useful and necessary pieces of legislation, but in a number of important respects they have been found to be inadequate. It is a measure of how far they fall below current international standards that the European Court ruled that the existing provisions for equal pay for work of equal value were illegal in terms of the European provisions. That was a sorry tale.

Only a few days ago, another place expressed the opinion that the regulations that the Government are offering, after having been found to have acted illegally by the European Court, are still in contravention of the provisions that the European Court wishes to see implemented. Not only have the Government been found to have acted illegally, but there is a strongly held opinion that they are still acting illegally in the methods used to try to put the illegality right. It is not sufficient for Ministers to say that the regulations still stand. By a clear and free vote backed by distinguished judges, such as Lord Denning, the other place showed that it thought that the Government were not only not acting in good faith in bringing forward the regulations but acting illegally. The other place came to that view because the regulations were over-complex, insufficient, bureaucratic in character and allowed market force defences and all sorts of other provisions that strike right at the heart of the objectives that the regulations were designed to achieve. The Government are failing in their obligation to observe the directive from the European Commission and going back on their commitment to be genuine partners in the European Community.

Ms. Harman: Is not a striking contrast and telling difference to be found in the way that the Government have responded to the European Court's ruling on the importation of UHT milk, which will annihilate the doorstep delivery? The European Court of Justice made a decision on that matter in February this year, yet already regulations have been passed that will comply with its

Government are still supplying weapons which could be used against Argentina. Does the Minister accept that if the Government wish to dissuade the Argentine Government from taking advantage of the relaxation of American controls there is no better way to do it than to put an immediate embargo on the sale of British arms to Chile?

Mr. Whitney: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's condemnation of excited rhetoric. I hope that he will continue to take that view and to abjure the excited rhetoric that we have heard from him and from many of his right hon. and hon. Friends in the anti-American postures that they have adopted so regularly in past weeks — in opposition to all that the right hon. Gentleman himself previously stood for, although I appreciate his problems in seeking to maintain a facade of unity behind the rhetoric.

The circumstances of the transfers of heavy water have already been explained to the right hon. Gentleman and he knows that they had nothing to do directly with this Government. The attitude towards arms sales to Chile, which is not the subject of the statement, is examined on a case by case basis, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary explained clearly in the House on Wednesday.

I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman accepts the moderate, balanced and sensible tone of my statement.

Dr. Owen: I, too, welcome the marked difference in tone between the Minister's statement and those emanating from No. 10. Does he agree that it is a tragedy that the British Government will not be represented at the inauguration of President Alfonsín in Buenos Aires tomorrow?

Will the Minister explain what the Prime Minister meant when she wrote to me yesterday about the Argentine Government not having yet made a definitive declaration on the cessation of hostilities? The new President has talked about using peaceful means. The House should commend a man who, in the midst of the Falklands war, referred to the invasion as an illegitimate act by an illegal Government in a just cause. He is a true democrat and should be sustained by the House.

Will the Prime Minister now drop her hysterical attitude on fortress Falklands and realise that no country should continue to bear that burden unless there is failure to reach a negotiated settlement? She should now show generosity and a capacity to forgive, welcome the new democratic regime and declare the Government's readiness to open negotiations on the basis that they will be conducted by peaceful means only, which should be accepted as a satisfactory definition of the fact that hostilities are now over or will be over as from tomorrow.

Mr. Whitney: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on achieving his private notice question without its being allowed. I am happy to respond to it.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Whitney: I apologise, Mr. Speaker. With your permission, I shall be happy to respond to the substance of the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, although it is somewhat far from the statement.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that, as my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State said in another place this week, Her Majesty's Government

"welcome the election of a democratic Government in Argentina. We wish President-elect Alfonsín and his colleagues well."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 December 1983; Vol. 445, c. 1013.]

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will also acknowledge that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has consistently said that we look for normalisation of relations with the new Argentine Government.

The right hon. Gentleman must also recognise, however, that for the time being no cessation of the use of force has been formally declared and that it is vital that we continue to preserve the interests of the Falkland Islanders. In view of the support that he gave the Government in that difficult period last year, I hope that he will recognise that that vital principle must not be neglected.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my hon. Friend aware that, although Conservative Members believe that America is very much our best ally and deplore the anti-Americanism now sweeping through parts of this country and being triggered off by the words and actions of Opposition Members, some of us consider that it would have been rather more friendly and helpful if the Americans had required the Argentines to declare an end to hostilities with Britain before rushing to confer this benefit on them?

Mr. Whitney: The act of certification depended on progress on human rights and democracy in Argentina. As I said in my statement, the British Government acknowledge that significant progress has indeed been made in Argentina in those two important areas. The next step — the authorisation of specific arms sales — is something else again. On that, we have received assurances from spokesmen for the United States Administration. We have been assured, for example, that no arms transfers are contemplated that would increase the prospects of a renewed conflict in the Falklands.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South): Is it not the case that the defence of the Falkland Islands depends not on what arms Argentina can or cannot acquire but upon the ability and will of this country to reinforce the islands when a real threat to them exists?

Mr. Whitney: That is a major factor. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that Her Majesty's Government are fully conscious of that point and are taking all steps to meet it.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my hon. Friend agree that while a state of hostility formally exists it is necessary for our armed forces in the Falkland Islands area to remain at the highest state of vigilance? Can we rely on the good offices of the United States Government to try to ensure that this state of hostilities is ended by the Argentine Government?

Mr. Whitney: I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that her Majesty's Government's commitment to the defence of the Falkland Islands is beyond question, as all the evidence and all the steps we have taken surely prove. I can also assure my hon. Friend that the United States Administration are left in no doubt about Her Majesty's Government's attitude to the future of the Falkland Islands and to our relations with the Argentine Government.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does not the United States' decision underline the fact that the

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

inexorable pressure of world events is compelling this country to recognise that it is being isolated in the Falklands and that sooner or later it will be forced to negotiate with the new Argentine regime? Is it not better to do so gracefully sooner rather than later?

Mr. Whitney: I repeat that Her Majesty's Government have already welcomed the democratic Government in Argentina. We have extended, through the statement by my noble Friend in another place the other day, our good wishes to President-elect Alfonsin and his colleagues. Our attitude to the future of the Falkland Islands government remains clear and our commitment to the future of the Falkland Islanders is beyond question.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): Does my hon. Friend accept that, because of the importance of our alliance with the United States, his intimation that there were prior consultations before this decision was taken is most welcome? In the light of Secretary Weinberger's comments, will Her Majesty's Government indicate to the American Government which classes of weapons we consider it would be unhelpful for them to supply to Argentina?

Mr. Whitney: I certainly accept my hon. Friend's point. As I pointed out, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made our position clear to the President in September and we have been kept fully informed by the American since those exchanges. On the issue of arms sales, the assurances we have been given by the United States, which have been made publicly, can give confidence to the House that the aim that my hon. Friend wishes and indeed we all wish, will be achieved.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister recall that at the beginning of this year the Prime Minister, along with the banks in this country and in connivance, I assume, with the United States banking set-up and the rest, decided that it would be in the best interests of the world's economy, or, more precisely, the banking economy, to send a lot of money to Argentina in order that this bankers' ramp could be continued? Does not the Minister agree that what he has had to say today about America and the selling of missiles is more than a little hypocritical in view of the fact that, were not the British banks taking part in the exercise to loan money to Argentina, the Argentines would not be so well equipped to buy those arms which, undoubtedly, on one occasion or another, will be landing on the airport which is costing the British taxpayer so much money?

Mr. Whitney: Not for the first time the hon. Gentleman is led astray by cries about a bankers' ramp. If the hon. Gentleman were to take time just occasionally to reflect calmly on British interests, he would accept that the Government are pursuing a calm, moderate and sensible policy in this difficult direction.

Mr. Skinner: Answer the question.

Mr. Whitney: With regard to the aid that our banks have given to Argentina, the hon. Gentleman should understand, as I am sure do workers in this country, that the prosperity of Britain and the jobs of British workers depend on the future of the banking system.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): Does my hon. Friend agree that our long-term aim must be a prosperous and

secure future for the Falkland Islands without an undue burden on this country? In this respect, I welcome very much his statement that we are pursuing a normalisation of relations with the Argentine and his welcome to the Alfonsin Government. Will he reaffirm that we are determined now to normalise our relations with the Argentines? What steps might bring this into effect?

Mr. Whitney: I am happy to reaffirm Her Majesty's Government's strong desire to achieve a normalisation of relations with Argentina and at the same time, of course, to fulfil the commitment we have given and continue to give to secure the future of the Falkland Islanders. I believe that at this stage it would be premature to make any early forecasts about a Government who, after all, have not yet taken office.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the Minister agree that the long-term defence of the Falkland Islands and particularly of the islanders' way of life depends not so much on a huge military fortress which no longer has public support in the United Kingdom but on early negotiations with Argentina without unnecessary preconditions?

Mr. Whitney: I can only repeat that Her Majesty's Government's policy, which I have outlined over the past few minutes, will achieve the ends we seek, which are the protection of the interests of the Falkland islanders and a normalisation of our relations with Argentina. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that it takes two to tango.

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): However welcome may be the improved legitimacy and democratic quality of the new Argentine regime, does not the normalisation of relations depend on the new President saying that he disagrees with his air force general who announced the other day that his air force would continue to probe the defences of the Falkland Islands in order to increase the cost to this country of defending them?

Mr. Whitney: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point. We very much need a clear statement from the Argentine Government, once they assume office, that the use of force is banned for ever from their policy towards the Falkland Islands.

Dame Judith Hart (Clydesdale): As the Minister has welcomed the restoration of democracy in Argentina, and as it is clear that the American Government recognise the tremendous improvement in human rights there which is the result of that, does he agree, first, that, having welcomed the election of Mr. Alfonsin, it is necessary to take any steps which will preserve and strengthen democracy in Argentina — that is relevant to the discussions that may take place between the two Governments — and, secondly, that this requires a complete review of our policies in Latin America, particularly in relation to arms sales to Chile? Is it not absurd that we welcome democracy in Argentina but continue to supply arms to its major enemy, which is the grossest offender against human rights in the whole of Latin America?

Mr. Whitney: I assure the right hon. Lady that, although we welcome the steps taken towards democracy in Argentina, when she asks whether we would consider any sacrifice, I must tell her that there are vital interests with regard to the Falkland Islanders which we most certainly will not sacrifice in that interest.

I have already told the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) that the case in Chile is considered item by item. I wish that the right hon. Lady and her right hon. and hon. Friends would accept that there have been steps towards the opening of democracy in Chile during the past few months.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): As the Minister referred to the reaction of the Foreign Office as being "calm" and "moderate" towards this action by the United States, may we be assured that the Prime Minister has seen and approved his statement?

Mr. Whitney: It should scarcely be necessary for me to assure the distinguished right hon. Gentleman that any statement made from the Dispatch Box of course carries the agreement and approval of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I assure him and the House that any attempt to suggest that there is a wedge between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Prime Minister is pure fiction.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my hon. Friend accept that, although hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish President Alfonsín the best, we still have to conduct our defence of the Falklands on the basis that South American politics can be turbulent and the fact that there is a democratic regime there today does not mean that there will be a democratic regime there tomorrow?

Mr. Whitney: Sadly, that will remain a factor in Latin American politics, as it remains a factor in the politics of all too many countries.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Remembering the Minister's excellent speech from the Government Back Benches when the task force was sent to the south Atlantic, may we take it that he at least recognises that this is one more step along the road to complying with the United Nations resolution that, to save ourselves enormous costs, we should get down as soon as possible to negotiating the future of the Malvinas?

Mr. Whitney: I did not quite recognise the last word in the hon. Gentleman's question. I should hate to accept his praise undeservedly. I recall that my statement on 2 April 1982 strongly urged the Government that, as the fleet steamed to the south Atlantic, they should negotiate earnestly and seriously to try to achieve a peaceful resolution. That is precisely what the Government did. The tragedy was that the military regime in the Argentine rejected those attempts.

The Government's policy is to normalise our relations with the Argentine, while preserving the vital interests of the Falkland Islanders, which we have committed ourselves to preserving.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Will my hon. Friend confirm that if the new Argentine Government made sensible overtures to us the Government would receive them with a positive and magnanimous attitude?

Mr. Whitney: My hon. Friend tempts me into the realms of hypothetical questions. Let us see what overtures develop. I assure my hon. Friend that they will be considered positively, in the spirit of our professed desire to restore normal economic and diplomatic relations with the Argentine.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): As the United States Government have said that in future arms sales to the Argentine they will distinguish between arms that could be used for a military invasion of the Falklands and those that could not, are the British Government satisfied that such a distinction can be made? If so, will they consider sending the Americans a list of the arms that they think would not be used in a military invasion of the Falklands?

Mr. Whitney: The United States Administration have given us an undertaking that they will remain in close consultation on this issue, and their performance has shown that they are firmly honouring that undertaking. I have no doubt that we shall remain in close consultation on the points raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that when a previous Labour Government decided to remove the deterrent force of an aircraft carrier and a support ship from the south Atlantic and the Indian ocean they left the Falkland islands with no means of deterring aggression? May we be assured that plans being made now, by either the United States or ourselves, will not put the Falkland Islanders at risk again?

Mr. Whitney: The real crisis for the Falkland islands came with the total failure of the Argentines to understand the Government's determination to resist aggression. After the events of last year, I am confident that neither the next Argentine Government nor any successor Government will be in any doubt about the fact that while the Conservative party is in power we shall respond positively in defence of the legitimate interests of the Falkland Islanders and any other minority people for whom we have responsibility.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Last night, a senior member of the Cabinet said of our relationship with Washington: "the scars are healing, but they are still there and we may get beyond the US election before we are back in the kind of circumstances where we have got better relations." That was said before this latest announcement. Does the Minister agree that the so-called special relationship between President Reagan and our Prime Minister is in tatters?

Mr. Whitney: Of course I do not. It is important to understand that the fundamental interests of and the relationship between the United States and this country extend far beyond any individuals, however important they may be.

Mr. Healey: Hear, hear.

Mr. Whitney: The fundamental interests that we share are absolute. The tragedy is that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) used to understand that fact, but now, under the pressure of too many of his hon. Friends, he is ready to renege on it.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Is the Minister saying that the Government's attitude to and willingness to negotiate with and sell arms to other Governments is not in the least related to whether those Governments are democratic or in fundamental breach of human rights?

Mr. Whitney: Did the hon. Gentleman refer to the United States or the British Government?

Mr. Dubs: I was talking about the British Government.

Mr. Whitney: The hon. Gentleman should understand that, as has been explained many times in the House, the Government's policy is to consider those matters case by case. That has been done over the years by Governments of both complexions. It is the most sensible way to conduct our relations in the interests of Britain.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaugh): Does my hon. Friend agree that but for the bravery of the British forces and the courage of our Prime Minister the chances are that the junta would still be in power in the Argentine and that the democracy there today owes a great deal more to the troops who died and the actions of the Government than to anything said by the Opposition?

Mr. Whitney: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Opposition's position during the months following the invasion was difficult to follow, because it moved so rapidly. There is no doubt that the point made by my hon. Friend is well taken.

Mr. Healey: Despite the typical comment made by the Minister a moment ago, I repeat that we welcome the fact that his statement has opened the prospect of a return to common sense by the Government in relation to the problems of the Falklands and the Argentine. As the hon. Gentleman has said that he wants to normalise our relations with the Argentines, will he agree that by far the best demonstration of that desire would be to take advantage of President Alfonsín's taking office tomorrow to announce the full restoration of diplomatic relations between London and Buenos Aires? Sending an ambassador back to Buenos Aires would be by far the best demonstration of the Government's intentions and would not, in itself, imply anything further.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry if the right hon. Gentleman thinks that my response was typical. What I was doing, and I shall readily continue to do it, was pointing out the inconsistencies in his attitude to the United States.

With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's substantive point, the Government continue to wish to see the normalisation of relations with the Argentine. However, I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman, because it is appropriate in this context, that it takes two to tango.

Mr. Speaker: May I remind the House that it is not in order for right hon. or hon. Members to make any reference on the Floor of the House to the fact that a private notice question has not been accepted by the Chair. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will observe our long-standing practice in that respect.

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Michael Cocks (Bristol, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise with you a matter that could be raised only after a full study of the *Official Report* for yesterday, which hon. Members will now have had the chance to look at. I refer to the statement made yesterday by the Minister for Health about National Health Service pharmaceuticals. That statement occupies some nine and a half columns of the *Official Report*—c. 477 to 486. Despite that, some right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House were squeezed out from asking questions.

At the time, the Minister was suspected of filibustering. If we examine the official record we find that after his opening statement and the reply from my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), the questions occupy some 144 lines whereas the Minister's replies occupy some 237. I ask you to examine that, Mr. Speaker, because it is a possible abuse of the House if a Minister, by giving inordinately long answers, is able to protect himself from full cross-examination on a highly contentious matter.

Mr. Robert MacLennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you also consider the episode regarding the Prime Minister's statement after her return from the Athens summit? Will you measure the number of lines taken by the Leader of the Opposition and compare them with the number taken by the Prime Minister? If you do so, you will realise that there is some equity in these matters.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As, Mr. Speaker, you are to be asked to examine all of these lines in *Hansard*, many column inches and to rule on God knows what else before Christmas, will you take into account the fact that when the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, (Dr. Owen) was the Foreign Secretary, he used to make long, fudging and mudding answers?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I can content myself by saying that I have, of course, studied *Hansard*, as I do every day. I have been somewhat perturbed at the length of questions and answers at Question Time as well as after statements. The House would help the Chair and itself if questions and answers could be shorter, as many more hon. Members could then be called.