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22/xi

22 November 1985

Dear John

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CHANNEL FIXED LINK

We agreed last week that we should have a debate on the Fixed Link. We need to consider quickly the timing and form of any such debate.

There are three points at which debates would take place - one before a decision is taken, at which Ministers could only listen - two, after a decision is taken when we would ask the House to endorse our decision - three, at Second Reading of the Hybrid Bill. Three would be too many debates, so I suggest we try and settle for the first and the third only. An ideal time for the first debate would be during the first two weeks of December. That would enable Members to make their views known to us in time for them to be taken into account in the Government's decision. It would be unwise, however, to put off holding the debate beyond 17 December. That is the day when I expect to receive the report of the assessment group which is currently considering the four proposals. From that point on, it will be difficult for me to resist pressure to reveal the results of the assessment.

Clearly the House could not debate a substantive Government motion; this would not be possible in advance of a decision. The only way would be to have a debate on the adjournment and this is the course I think we should follow. No doubt opponents of the Link will vote against the Adjournment, but this cannot be helped.

I should be glad to know that you agree that we should arrange a debate on the adjournment during early December.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister,
Willie Whitelaw, Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd, Michael Heseltine,
John Wakeham, members of E(A) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours

Nicholas

NICHOLAS RIDLEY



Strategic Defence Initiative

4.17 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the agreement between the British Government and the American Administration in support of the United States strategic defence initiative."

SDI is clearly specific. It has been specific since President Reagan's televised speech on 23 March 1983. SDI is important. If the American strategic defence initiative goes ahead, it could well herald the escalation of the nuclear arms race into space which is likely to make the nuclear holocaust come sooner rather than later. SDI is important because the agreement means that the British Government are the first Government in Europe to support the American "star wars" project. No amount of haggling over dollars or grovelling for Pentagon contracts can conceal that, as the demeaning statement of the Secretary of State has made clear this afternoon.

The matter is urgent, because there has been no debate or Division in this House on the principle of the strategic defence initiative. It is a scandal that the agreement should have been signed without Parliament first having an opportunity to discuss the principle of the SDI research programme. The Government are making a mockery of Parliament, and I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to end that forthwith.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the agreement between the British Government and the United States Administration in support of the United States strategic defence initiative."

I regret that I have to give the hon. Member the same answer as I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

BILLS PRESENTED

TELEVISION ACT 1964 (AMENDMENT)

Mrs. Ann Clwyd, supported by Mr. Laurie Pavitt, Mr. Roger Sims, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Willie W. Hamilton, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Keith Best and Mr. D. E. Thomas presented a Bill to amend the provisions of the Television Act 1964 to prohibit the mention or display in television broadcasts of the brand names, colour, logos or other identifying characteristics of tobacco products; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 11 April and to be printed. [Bill 46.]

DOG FIGHTING (PENALTIES)

Mr. Harry Greenway presented a Bill to amend the Protection of Animals Act 1911 to increase the penalties for causing or procuring, or assisting at, the fighting or baiting of any animal: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 11 April and to be printed. [Bill 47.]

Channel (Fixed Link)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Sainsbury.]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Front Benches in this important debate, may I repeat what I said earlier? No fewer than 28 right hon. and hon. Members have already sought to take part, and there may be others. I have no authority yet, under our Standing Orders, to limit speeches to 10 minutes, but I hope that the House will take account of the large number of hon. Members who wish to take part.

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): On this occasion we want to listen to views on the channel fixed link. We have not decided whether there should be a fixed link, nor which of the four schemes is preferable. I shall not therefore say much about their merits, but rather talk about procedures.

On 2 April, I announced the issue by the British and French Governments of the guidelines, which are the basis upon which promoting groups are to make their proposals. The guidelines made it clear that, while essential political guarantees would be provided by the Governments, it was essential for promoters to demonstrate that their projects could proceed without support from public funds or Government guarantees against commercial or technical risks. The guidelines also require promoters to set out in their proposals the engineering and other technical characteristics of their projects, and also their environmental, employment and social impacts. They laid great stress on the need for public consultation by the promoters themselves, to ascertain the views of people affected by the projects and, when possible, to adapt their schemes to meet local concerns.

The timetable set out last spring is still on course. The responses by the promoters have been, if anything, better than we expected. Four valid proposals were received by 31 October—Channel Expressway, The Channel Tunnel Group, Eurobridge and Euroroute. Those proposals are now being thoroughly assessed by the joint Anglo-French group of officials. Numerous outside expert consultants are looking closely at the financial, environmental, engineering and hydrological aspects of each scheme. The risks of plant and animal diseases using the link are being carefully assessed as is any vulnerability to terrorist attack. The aim is that the group should report to me and the French Minister of Transport by Christmas. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has planned to meet the President of France before the end of January to announce a decision on which scheme, if any, should in due course be brought before Parliament for approval. The Government intend, as soon as possible after that decision, to make a full statement to Parliament explaining the reasons behind their choice, backed up by a White paper giving as much information as possible.

Negotiations are also taking place with the French on the necessary treaty. We intend that, if the decision in January is positive, it will be signed before the end of February. It will, of course, be subject to subsequent endorsement by Parliament through the hybrid Bill procedure. The hybrid Bill would be introduced during March. The timetable of events that we announced last April is being followed.

The House will not expect me to give any advance information about the Government's assessment of the proposals today. Officials have not yet completed their assessment and it would be foolish of me to pre-judge their work.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Among the various criteria that the Government have considered such as terrorism or the prevention of disease entering the country, has any study been made of the possible economic effect of the development of the link On Scotland and the north of England?

Mr. Ridley: All such factors are being taken into account in the assessments that are being made. Such matters will be covered in the White Paper that will be issued by the Government when we make a statement on the decision.

When the guidelines were published, they were warmly welcomed. The prospect they offered, that—after a period of uncertainty that makes the Stansted saga look positively rushed!—a fixed Channel link was likely to be built, met with general approval on both sides of the House, and by commentators outside. Many people feel that a scheme for a Channel link was exactly the sort of exciting construction project that would stimulate economic activity and improve the flow of people and goods to Europe. Many previous doubters were reassured because the taxpayer would not be contributing a penny towards it.

Of course, as is always the case when we move from the general to the specific, doubts arise and questions are asked. Those who are against the link naturally play on those doubts and fears. That is followed by concern about the method by which the Government are proceeding to take the decision. That crystallises in the argument that we should hold a full public inquiry into any chosen link.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North) indicated assent.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) on the Opposition Front Bench, confirms that that will be the thrust of the case that he will develop later. If I may say so, that is a most extraordinary decision taken by the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition is recorded in the press as saying that he is in favour of a link, but thinks that there should be a public inquiry. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)—I cannot understand why the hon. Gentleman is not in his place for this important transport matter—is joint chairman of the all-party Channel tunnel group. He must, by definition, be in favour of a link. I wonder whether he will support a public local inquiry. He should know—I am sure he does—that that would bring any chance of the link coming into effect to a full stop.

Opposition Members should think carefully about their proposals. When they revived the hybrid Bill in 1974 for the Channel tunnel, they made it clear that there would not be a public inquiry. Secondly, they know that there are massive numbers of jobs involved in the project, many of which could go to heavy industry in the north. How can the Opposition constantly demand more jobs and then make conditions that would frustrate them?

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): I remind my right hon. Friend that, as long ago as 1973, my right hon.

friend Lord Peyton and I agreed with the then French Government that we would proceed to build a Channel link. The years have passed and nothing has happened. The remedy proposed by the Opposition of a public inquiry would simply ensure that the job that we have been waiting for for so long would not happen.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right, as I now want to go on to say in detail.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I am a supporter of the scheme. The right hon. Gentleman said that it would bring jobs to the north-east and to Scotland. Surely, under the EEC rules the contracts will have to go out to tender within the EEC. Will the right hon. Gentleman reassure us on that point?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is right. The contracts must be placed without national discrimination. However, I shall be extremely surprised if British industry does not win a sizeable chunk of the contracts. Certainly, French industry will get its share.

Mr. John Silkin (Lewisham, Deptford): The right hon. Gentleman talks about jobs that will be awarded and, as he says, they may or may not come here. Has he made an assessment of the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of the link?

Mr. Ridley: The right hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said earlier. All those matters are being assessed but I have not yet got the results. The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait until the Government have finished their analysis.

Thirdly, the Opposition know in their heart of hearts that it would be quite impossible for private promoters to proceed with the project if they were subject to the risks and delay of the public inquiry system. I make no apology for saying that we must proceed at reasonable speed. We take an inordinately long time in this country to take—albeit important—planning decisions: 17 years for the Okehampton bypass and 22 years for Stansted. Against the clamour for more infrastructure spending, we should all agree that that scale of delay is damaging investment in our infrastructure. Look at our competitors abroad—the French, for instance. They seem always to be able to do things much faster than we can. Of course, careful and proper consideration of the environmental and economic impacts of a project on a locality is vital. I yield to no one in my belief that we must consult and consider those things. But that should not be synonymous with delay: delay of year upon year. We should be able to take account of the interests of people affected without endless delay. Delay has become a weapon used under our planning procedures in order to frustrate development. I have to tell the House that a lengthy public inquiry would sound the death knell for the link.

The reasons are simple. First, the principle whether there should be a fixed link and, if so, which scheme, must be determined by Parliament, in response to a proposal of the Government. It is a project of national importance, befitting of national decision.

Secondly, the project is unique in that it has to be facilitated by two sovereign states, Britain and France. As I have said, our two national systems for considering and implementing investment projects are very different, and the French have a much more abbreviated system than our own. Indeed, it is difficult enough to proceed in tandem

on the basis of the hybrid Bill procedure in this country. In France, authorisation for the construction of a fixed link could be given in six months. In the United Kingdom, we require up to 18 months, even without a public local inquiry. To try and combine the French timetable with a British public inquiry and a hybrid Bill—for both would be necessary—would kill the project stone dead.

Thirdly, the project is unusual both in its scale and in that it is to be financed wholly in the private sector. The investment institutions would not be willing to give the sort of commitments necessary if they were faced with the long and protracted timetable and the uncertainty of a favourable decision resulting from the public inquiry procedure.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my right hon. Friend amplify the most helpful replies that he has given so far? Will he make it abundantly clear that, in the unfortunate event of the tunnel being half built and the promoters running out of money, there would be no question of any guarantees for further borrowing being given by the Government or any public bodies such as the EEC?

Mr. Ridley: That does not follow the logic of my argument, but I give my hon. Friend that assurance. If what he describes happened, the promoters or others would have to decide whether to raise more money to complete the structure or to abandon it.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Is it not clear that there will have to be some form of public expenditure on infrastructure for whichever project of the four is chosen? My right hon. Friend cannot produce answers today, but in due course will he produce for the House a full costing of each of the projects' requirements for infrastructure investment? Will he confirm that it remains the Government's policy, as it was of all their predecessors, to do what they can to encourage, by means of grant, the transfer of traffic from road to rail?

Mr. Ridley: There will be increasing traffic through the channel ports, whether or not a link is built. We shall have to provide improved road communications, and they will be provided whether or not a link is built. If a link is built, it will be the responsibility of the promoters to connect it up to the motorway network, not of the state. Therefore, there should not be increased public expenditure purely because of that. I immediately admit that any railway investment will need to come out of public investment funds, but that is because the railways are nationalised and do not therefore have access to private capital. It happens all the time.

A public inquiry could not be a substitute for a hybrid Bill, but would have to be in addition to it. A public local inquiry would mean a great deal of duplication of effort for all concerned, not least for the objectors.

Those arguments convinced the Select Committee, which recommended in its report last week that there should be no public inquiry, broadly for the reasons that I have described. For the Labour party now to demand a public inquiry is to demand that a fixed link should not be built. If that is what Labour Members feel, let them stand up and be counted. But I beg the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North not to hide behind shallow and misleading arguments about public local inquiries.

[Mr. Ridley]

Instead, he should tell the House whether he and his party are in favour of a link being built. Nothing else will convince us.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I understand what my right hon. Friend says about a major public inquiry although I do not entirely agree with him. Will he assure the House that if the scheme is approved, wherever public inquiries are called for, for wayleaves and so on, they will take place, or will that provision be overridden? Will there be one hybrid Bill and no public inquiries?

Mr. Ridley: There will be a hybrid Bill, which will give the promoters all the necessary powers. I shall describe the procedure for the hybrid Bill, which might help my hon. Friend.

Although the decision has to be taken by Parliament, we want maximum local consultation. The location of the portal of any link is dictated by geography. So the matters to be considered and consulted upon locally are principally, but not exclusively, first, the precise effects of the link on those immediately affected, on their properties and amenities, secondly, the effect on the local economy in terms of jobs gained and lost, in construction and upon opening, and, more importantly, the employment likely to be gained by this mammoth transport development — perhaps the biggest communications artery in Europe. It will act as a magnet for growth in Kent. Thirdly, there is the effect on the natural environment — bird and plant life, the cherished white cliffs, and the Garden of England which is Kent. Fourthly, there are the communications needs of the area as a result of the link — roads and railway services — which will alter as a result of its construction, and, fifthly, the effects any structure that would be built in the channel would have on the safety of shipping and the freedom of navigation. It is impossible to comment on those matters properly before the choice is made, except in a rudimentary form, because we do not yet know which scheme, if any, we are considering. Nevertheless we are doing, and will continue to do, all that is possible.

In our guidelines we encouraged promoters to undertake informal consultation with local authorities, expert bodies, persons affected and other interested parties. Some of the promoters have been very active indeed in consulting widely, as hon. Members can testify. The responsibility to consult did not come to an end when the schemes were submitted on 31 October. The adequacy of individual promoters' consultation arrangements will be one of the matters to which the Government will pay attention when they make their decision in January.

Nevertheless, we are having extensive consultations with local authorities in Kent and adjoining areas. We also placed advertisements in national and local newspapers, inviting comments on the four promoters' schemes. Arrangements have been made for public inspection of the proposals throughout Kent and in my Department's offices throughout the country. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has already visited the area, and I shall follow next week. We have discussed the matter with the local authorities and my hon. Friends who represent Kent constituencies. They have been assiduous in bringing the concerns of their constituents to our attention. We have already learnt a lot from them of the concerns of local

people. I should like to pay particular tribute to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). He is unable to speak up publicly for his constituents. Nevertheless he has been tireless and assiduous in telling me of the concerns of his constituents. I can assure the House that the comments that we receive from him, from hon. Members, from local authorities, and from groups and individuals, will be taken fully into account before any decision is reached on the principle of a fixed link. We shall take very careful note of the comments made by hon. Members this afternoon, but I must also emphasise that, uniquely, we are not consulting about a chosen scheme, but about four possibilities. This is not a situation for which we have precedents.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): One aspect about the enforcement of British law concerns many people. With the multiple ports of entry at the moment, a large element of law enforcement falls not upon national but upon local resources. Weights and measures inspectors should ask themselves: are the imports of the standard required by consumer protection law? Because that is so expensive for imports coming into the whole country, it is not enforced because the cost is too heavy for local authorities. If a much larger proportion of people and goods coming into Britain are to be channelled through one location, be it by rail or road, or both, do the Government have it in mind that the cost of effective enforcement should then fall upon the national Exchequer, not upon the local exchequer? If it falls upon local taxation resources, the job will not be done efficiently. That is a matter of great concern throughout Britain.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend has raised many matters in one intervention. Customs and Excise, members of my Department who check lorry weights and documentation, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food inspectors and many other officials will be involved in those matters. I shall write a full letter to my hon. Friend setting out the precise answers to his questions, rather than attempt to answer them in length today.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I hope that the fixed link will be a rail link. A public inquiry should establish what information exists about the likely psychological effects on some drivers who drive through 25 miles of tunnel. In the Minister's Department is there a psychologist's report or information on how drivers would behave if there is a road link? Those drivers will be doing what has not been done before. Some people have enough difficulty in the Dartford or Clyde tunnels. Are we sure that those who would be driving through 25 miles of tunnel would behave rationally.

Mr. Ridley: I cannot think of any worse forum for investigating that matter than a public local inquiry. That is being carefully considered in the assessment studies, and it may be a matter that a Select Committee on a hybrid Bill would wish to pursue. Those channels are better suited to pursuing the matter rather than a public local inquiry, which deals with planning and not psychology.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Minister have any information about it?

Mr. Ridley: I shall go on to the next point—

Mr. Dalyell: The answer is no.

Mr. Ridley: There will be further consultations and opportunities for comment on a firm proposal. We shall

consult local authorities, and amenity groups in particular, about the content of the proposed legislation. There would also be consultation throughout the passage of the hybrid Bill, so that any problems of detail could be resolved in the legislation. The precise effect on the environment, the economy and on transport links, and upon those personally affected, will be much easier to assess and take into account.

The hybrid Bill procedure contains every opportunity for those affected to be heard, including the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) with his psychological problem.

Mr. Dalyell: Vulgar and cheap.

Mr. Ridley: The procedure is well known to the House. It is comparable to the private Bill procedure, which has always been used for building railways and similarly requires no public inquiry. It was used when similar proposals were produced in 1974. The Select Committee recommended that we should follow the precedent of the 1974 Channel Tunnel Bill. We shall. If the House gives the Bill a Second Reading, it will be committed to a Select Committee to hear and consider petitions. The Bill will already have been advertised; anyone who has an objection to it will have an opportunity to petition against it and, subject to his petition being accepted by the Committee, he will appear and present his case to the Select Committee. Subject to the rulings of the Select Committee, I would expect that those eligible would include individuals whose private interests are affected—those representing local trades, businesses and other local interests which may be adversely affected, those representing amenity, ecology, educational and recreational interests who believe that their interests are adversely affected to a material degree, and local authorities in any affected areas.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Is it parliamentary language to say that another hon. Member has psychological problems?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): There was nothing out of order in what the Secretary of State said.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member for Linlithgow mentioned the psychological problem of driving through tunnels. That is all that I meant.

The Bill will then go to Standing Committee and Third Reading in the normal way. The Bill will then be considered in the other place and the same Select Committee procedure with consideration of petitions will apply before it proceeds again through the normal Bill procedure. This is a substantial and thorough procedure which ensures that the public have the widest opportunity to make representations as petitioners to the two Select Committees. This is, of course, in addition to the rights of members of the public to lobby hon. Members and noble lords during the Standing Committee stages.

I understand the anxiety of local people about the impact that a fixed link would be likely to have on the economy and infrastructure of east Kent. Kent county council and other local authorities have already made representations. What such effects are will depend on the scheme chosen. The assessment that is currently being carried out will identify, as far as possible, the implications of each of the schemes.

I assure my hon. Friends that the Government will consider matters sympathetically, in the light of the scheme chosen, giving priority to necessary improvement in the national and local roads system. I intend to ensure that a high-quality route is provided along the M20 between the M25 and the entrance to the link. I hope that work on the Maidstone-Ashford section of the M20 will commence in 1987. Improvements are currently in hand on the A2. We shall consider whether further improvements are needed.

We already have plans to improve the A20 between Folkestone and Dover and, once a decision in principle has been taken on the Channel fixed link, we shall decide the precise alignment, design and standard of those improvements, and press ahead.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): My right hon. Friend discussed the impact on road transport. Will he consider the impact on air transport, especially in relation to the expansion of Heathrow and Stansted airports? Will he also consider the impact of a high-speed rail link through the Channel tunnel on short-haul European routes?

Mr. Ridley: That factor has to be taken into account in the assessment studies, to derive a forecast of the likely numbers of users of the link.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): Bearing in mind the fact that none of us can look into the future with certainty and know which form of transport will be used in 20 or 30 years' time, should we ensure that a fixed link encompasses road and rail traffic?

Mr. Ridley: All four schemes currently include a rail link, three of them include a drive-through road link and the fourth proposes a road link on a shuttle service. Therefore, what my hon. Friend suggests is likely to be the case.

Local roads may also come under strain. I shall give special consideration, within the transport supplementary grant system, to schemes included in Kent's transport policy and programmes that are necessary as a direct result of the link.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston) rose—

Mr. Ridley: There may also be consequences for rail services. Each of the promoter's schemes would have different implications for British Rail. British Rail's investment proposals will have to be commercially justified.

Mr. Marshall: I had hoped that the Secretary of State would have given way before he finished dealing with road improvements. Road improvements in the Kent area are important, but road facilities are also important to the Scottish economy. Does the Minister agree, and would he recommend to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, that one essential of the construction of any fixed link is the complete upgrading to motorway standards of the A74?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member can hardly accuse me of not giving way when I was dealing with road improvements, because I do not believe that he sought to intervene. I gave way to the hon. Gentleman the moment he sought to do so. I shall convey to the Secretary of State

[Mr. Ridley]

for Scotland what the hon. Gentleman said. However, off the cuff, I cannot see the connection between the A74 and the construction of the possible fixed link.

I conclude on the wider interests. The Government want a fixed link built. Let there be no doubt about that. Whether it is built depends on whether the private sector is prepared to finance it. But, if it is, a fixed link offers immense opportunities for individuals, businesses and for jobs.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Secretary of State mentioned investment. Will he consider the position of the major ferry operators across the Channel? What does he believe will be the future for SNCF, P and O ferries and Sally Line?

Mr. Ridley: The effect on the ferries will vary enormously according to which link is chosen. Those matters are being carefully considered in the assessment, and we shall give our conclusions on that, as on many other points, in the White Paper.

The English Channel has always been a physical and a psychological barrier to the fast and economic movement of people and goods. A fixed link would remove that barrier. It offers the prospect of lower transport costs. Business men and exporters will have quicker and more reliable communications with their main markets. The European Community accounts for more than 60 per cent. of our foreign trade. Holidaymakers will have easier access and greater choice for journeys to and from the Continent. The British tourist industry will also benefit, because tourist traffic will be two ways.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): My right hon. Friend is about to reach his peroration but has not yet mentioned an important procedural point. If we put physical objects in the Channel, what will the Government do about consulting all the maritime nations? My right hon. Friend will recall that the 1981 Select Committee report drew attention to that problem. Perhaps it was wrong. Will my right hon. Friend express a view on the matter, because it would rule out the bridge option or any option that would place obstacles in the Channel if we had to consult all the maritime nations.

Mr. Ridley: All the maritime nations are represented by the International Maritime Organisation, which we have consulted closely about possible impediments in the Channel. The result of that consultation will be taken into account in our assessment.

Such a vast project offers a boost to the construction industry and to all the British companies that supply it. But, more significant than any of those matters, the construction of a fixed link will demonstrate the remarkable change that is taking place in the confidence of British industry. If it is to succeed, private promoters, investors and banks will be willing to undertake the most spectacular civil engineering project of recent European history and to take the risk, not only on revenue, but on the time and cost of construction without financial guarantees. Successful completion will set the seal on the change from public burden to private enterprise and from pessimism to confidence.

Let us all hope that such a scheme can go forward without delay, backed by political and financial courage.

4.52 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): As the Secretary of State said, a fixed link—or a Channel tunnel, as we used to call it—has been the subject of debate for a long time. I have vivid memories of it during the 1966 general election campaign, when the Labour party candidate for Aberdeen, North was Hector Hughes. He was a well-respected and much-loved Member of Parliament in Aberdeen, for as much as despite his occasional eccentricity. When asked what he would do to develop the economy of Aberdeen, he said that we should build a tunnel between Aberdeen and Oslo—of course, ignoring the 25-mile wide, 2,000-ft deep Norwegian trench. The press rushed to see the candidate in Aberdeen, South—my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—to ask whether he agreed. He said, "Of course, Mr. Hughes is speaking metaphorically." The press ran back to Mr. Hughes and asked him whether his remarks were metaphorical or real, and he said, "Damned young whippersnapper should take the advice of his elders. Of course, I mean it." That story has been the source of merriment in Aberdeen from time to time, which I am sure the late Hector Hughes would have enjoyed. But as I have told people since then, albeit tongue in cheek, had we taken Hector Hughes' advice in 1966, we might have found North sea oil much more quickly and cheaply.

I welcome the debate, although the first question in the minds of many hon. Members must be why we are having the debate today. We owe a debt of gratitude to the members of the Select Committee on Transport for producing their report, which helps to concentrate our minds. However, last week, the Committee had to meet two days earlier than planned to accelerate the production of the report. Indeed, it was available to the House only at 5.30 pm on Thursday. Furthermore, evidence submitted to the Select Committee will not be available to us for at least a fortnight. The report is valuable, but it is difficult to assess its recommendations. Although it is not my responsibility, I should draw the rushed production of the report to the attention of the Leader of the House and the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who is Chairman of the Liaison Committee, because something must be done to regulate Select Committee reports and to dovetail their publication with the business of the House. This is not the first time that the Select Committee on Transport has been treated in that way. Indeed, it was treated much worse in the past.

However, there is no real mystery about why we are debating the matter today. The Department of Transport issued a press notice stating that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport—the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Mr. Mitchell)—would visit Dover and other areas affected for public consultation on the fixed link. Almost simultaneously, the Department issued a press statement stating that there would be no debate in the House until after the Government had made up their mind. When I saw that, I feared so much for the safety of the Minister that I checked the size of his majority.

It would have been outrageous if we did not have a parliamentary debate on the matter until after the Government had decided which scheme they wanted and the treaty had been signed, sealed and delivered. I hold the House in high esteem, but I do not regard the debate as a substitute for wider discussion and consultation. There is

no doubt that we are discussing the important principle of whether there should be a fixed link across the Channel. Nor is there any doubt from the interventions during the Secretary of State's speech that the issue raises strong feelings for and against a fixed link and on the sort of link that should be chosen.

Although the Secretary of State said that the Government have not decided whether there should be a fixed link, they gave us the impression even today, that they are hell-bent on having such a link. No other conclusion could be put on the Secretary of State's speech—certainly not on his peroration. The first charge that I make against the Government is that they will proceed without a thorough examination of the fixed link and its impact on a range of policy issues.

We are told that, within 100 days of the promoters' scheme being submitted, the Civil Service will wade through 15,000 pages of detailed evidence in 31 days. We must ask whether that period is long enough for a reasonable appreciation of all matters, including driving through the tunnel, which the Secretary of State seemed to find so hilarious. However, it is an extremely important matter that must be discussed.

Mr. Adley: The arrival of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) on the Opposition Front Bench will remind us of the pressures on the late Anthony Crosland to cancel the project in 1974. They are reinforced by the absence from the Opposition Front Bench of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), who we know is strongly in favour. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the Labour party must make up its mind on this issue? Will he, before the end of his speech, make it clear whether, dependent upon the decision of the House tonight, the Labour party will accept the decision of the House, or whether he will subject the decision—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but the House must know where the Labour party stands on this issue of principle. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us before the end of his speech?

Mr. Hughes: Throughout his speech, the Secretary of State frequently said, "if any", "if any", "if any". To any question about the different considerations, he said that all matters would be considered. I accept in the spirit in which it was offered the hon. Gentleman's compliment to my intelligence and diligence: that, without having seen all the information held by the Department of Transport, and in a shorter time, I can give the House a definite answer this afternoon. I regret to say that the hon. Gentleman will have to wait and see.

We need to discuss a whole range of policy issues—the impact on transport policy; the impact on the environment in the areas most directly affected; the effects on regional employment policy; the importance of infrastructure developments in relation both to this sort of project and to investment in manufacturing industry. If we are to have sensible discussions on these and many other considerations on which I do not have time to dwell this evening, it is essential that there should be a public inquiry.

The proposal is a major step, and it is extremely important that we arrive at the right decision.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): Does the hon. Gentleman accept, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, that if there is a challenge in the High Court it might

be five, six, seven, or eight years before a decision is reached and there will be a blighting effect on many people, companies and businesses in east Kent? Does the hon. Gentleman accept the blighting effect that such a delay would cause?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman must be patient until I come to canvass the arguments about a public inquiry. There is at present a great deal of blight in the area that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. If he suggests that we should simply ride roughshod over public opinion, about which I have very strong views, he is wrong. That is one of the reasons why the Government will eventually be defeated. The hon. Gentleman has a dose of Whitehall centralitis, and the sooner people realise that the better.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend aware that the *Folkestone, Hythe and District Herald* sent out a questionnaire in its area, making only one simple inquiry: "What is your view of some sort of public inquiry?" Of the people who replied, 86 per cent. were in favour and only 14 per cent. were against.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. Hon. Members who are passionate about the fixed link will cite various public opinion polls saying what percentage of people are in favour of the fixed link, what percentage prefer to drive, and so on. Other surveys, however, are not mentioned. They show that a minimum of 70 per cent.—in the Folkestone case more than 80 per cent.—are in favour of a public inquiry.

The Minister is embarking on a disintegrated transport policy. He has not taken any account of the tremendous investment in ferries and ports which has taken place in the past decade since the issue was last under consideration. It is argued—whether one accepts it or not it must be considered in good faith—that Dover traffic will collapse entirely. Depending on which scheme is chosen, that collapse would ripple out and affect all the ports from Hull down to Southampton. Even if we allow for some exaggeration—and almost everyone is prone to exaggerate on these issues—these matters need to be clarified.

There are many different opinions as to how the fixed link would affect transport policy. The only matter on which there is the broadest measure of agreement is that, if there is a fixed link, it should have a rail component. Many of my hon. Friends feel very strongly about that and would accept the Select Committee's recommendations in favour of the Channel tunnel proposals. Whatever final scheme is approved, all the proposals have a rail link of one kind or another, and very heavy investment would be required in British Rail. Without heavy investment, British Rail would not get the maximum benefit from rail users, whether passenger or freight. There needs to be a commitment to investment in rail and a commitment to deliver that investment on time.

Viscount Cranborne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: There have been many interventions. If I allow any more, I may deprive the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Viscount Cranborne) of the opportunity to speak later in the debate.

The Select Committee on Transport considered the environmental impact very seriously. Paragraph 92 of its report states:

[Mr. Hughes]

"The Committee would therefore recommend that the Government look closely at the EIAs of all the promoters and subject the schemes to independent analysis and assessment especially with regard to cumulative secondary environmental implications, a subject which none of the EIAs adequately addresses."

That paragraph alone makes the case for a public inquiry. It clearly states that there must be assessments because the evidence submitted by the promoters does not measure up.

The Select Committee is not alone in suggesting that these matters be analysed. The local authorities in Canterbury, Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet have also suggested that, and they cannot be regarded in any sense as being Left-wing maverick authorities. In fact, I would describe them all as true blue Tory authorities. They have all condemned the lack of consultation.

Almost every conservation group has also called for a public inquiry. Kent county council appears to be in some difficulty. It opposed any link and now it opposes a public inquiry. It will have to make up its mind.

On Friday 6 December, the hon. Member for Thanet (Mr. Aitken) is reported in *The London Standard* as having said:

"The procedures under which it"—
the system of selecting the link—

"is being handled is full of indecent haste, unnecessary secrecy and starry-eyed optimism."

I know that the hon. Gentleman is in his place and I am sure that he will wish to reply for himself.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, told the nation on BBC that to proceed without a public inquiry would be unthinkable. I took the precaution of advising him that I intended to raise the matter in the House, but so far he has not denied the comment and he is not in the Chamber to do so now.

Regional policy is at the core of many people's suspicion about the impact of the fixed link. From Scotland, the north of England and the south-west, people have expressed anxiety to me about the effects of the fixed link. Many people believe that, quite apart from the size of the investment which is yet again going to the south-east, once the fixed link is in place there will be a magnetic pull which will attract investment in manufacturing jobs down to the start of the link.

I doubt whether there will be much investment in manufacturing, but if there is such investment we must consider these matters very seriously. We are told that we need not worry because the construction phase will create many jobs. At least one promoter is busily emphasising the regional dimension and how it will promote jobs.

It astonishes me that the Secretary of State can come to the House today and extol the virtues of capital investment, albeit private capital investment, as job creation. In Scotland we have fond memories of the Secretary of State when he was known to us as the butcher of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. His synthetic concern for jobs does not fool me at all. I do not believe that he has undergone a massive conversion.

Behind the arguments about job creation even in the short term is the assumption that jobs will be created in the United Kingdom. The only thing that is reasonably certain—we are not absolutely sure about it—is that the French and British promoters will each have roughly 50 per cent. of the construction costs to spend. We are told, however, that European competitive rules will have to

apply, so we cannot guarantee that jobs will be created because they will have to go to open tender. We know from experience that the French Government will make sure that the French francs are spent in France and that not many jobs will go outside. Our Government blandly say that it is for British industry to put up the right competition. With 4 million unemployed we certainly need the jobs, but in embarking on a scheme of this kind we must examine the balance between jobs lost and jobs gained and between short-term and long-term jobs.

Although I appreciate the argument about magnetic pull, I believe that there is a counter-mechanism which one might describe as "magnetic push". So long as there is sufficient infrastructure investment in British Rail, for example, the development of a through rail system could benefit companies in Scotland, the north of England and elsewhere.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My hon. Friend has referred to the conversion of the Secretary of State to job creation. Given the known attitude of the Secretary of State to regional policy, has my hon. Friend any confidence at all that the necessary measures will be taken to ensure that the magnetic pull effect does not have adverse consequence for the periphery of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend emphasises the point. The only way of ensuring long-term benefit for people whom some may regard as being on the periphery of the United Kingdom—some of us do not believe that the United Kingdom begins and ends in the City of London—is proper investment in British Rail, for example, so that it can compete over long distances and so that industry north of Watford can benefit from the increased speed of delivery.

It was suggested at the recent CBI conference that it might be a mistake to commit such large sums of capital to infrastructure rather than to manufacturing investment. All these matters involve a large number of imponderables. Moreover, some of the promoters are already amending the schemes that they submitted on 31 October.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman referred to the considerable benefit that this could bring to the railways, investment in rolling stock, and so on. If he had to choose between massive investment in development of the railway system with faster trains to the continent and the joy of a public inquiry, which would he choose?

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Does the Secretary of State really think that that is the choice to be made?

Mr. Hughes: The parameters of the debate are constantly changing and the promoters are constantly altering their schemes. I doubt whether a decision could possibly be reached in the magical 100-day period, although the Government seem intent on going ahead as fast as possible.

The Government argue that if there is no public inquiry by hybrid Bill procedure will allow objections to be sufficiently canvassed so that all these matters can be properly tested. The Select Committee on Transport recommended by a majority that there should not be a public inquiry, but it had serious reservations about the hybrid Bill procedure. The Government reminded us that in 1974 the Secretary of State allowed wider objections to

be canvassed, but the Select Committee pointed out in paragraph 27 of its report that once such a Bill has had a Second Reading the onus of proving its expediency is deemed to be removed from the promoters. The Secretary of State has said that he will follow the 1974 precedent, but I do not think that that pledge was as firm as some might think because he went on to detail various different considerations that would apply. If he or the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will give a specific pledge today that no one will be debarred from arguing the case before the Joint Committee, that might take some of the sting out of the situation. So far we have been told that the right of an objector to be heard will be a matter for the Committee, so the Secretary of State cannot slide round the matter by suggesting that the hybrid Bill procedure gives almost if not exactly the same possibilities as a public inquiry.

The Select Committee said that a White Paper should be published on the Government's choice. I am glad that the Secretary of State has confirmed that today. It is essential that that White Paper be debated and approved before any treaty is embarked upon. We do not know what the treaty will contain. The invitation to promoters suggests that it will probably contain a guarantee that there will be no interference by the Government in pricing policy. Does that mean that the successful bidder would be able to abuse a monopoly position? We also need to be sure, before the treaty is signed, that there is no suggestion that the work might have to be completed with public money or some other subsidy. The Minister has given that pledge, but I prefer to see these things in writing. I believe that for the Secretary of State to bind this or any other Government to treaty obligations without those obligations being debated and approved by Parliament is too much even for the present Government to exact from their compliant Back Benchers.

We agree about the need to provide the widest possible scope for objections to be heard, but the Select Committee also expressed other worries. For instance, it said that there should be a proper study of the effect on offshore islands, sand movements and variable current patterns in the Channel. I am not sure how that can be done while the link is being built. All these other serious considerations make the case for a public inquiry even stronger. Indeed, in the light of those comments, the Select Committee's recommendation that there should not be a public inquiry seems to be at odds with its own evidence.

There are advantages and disadvantages with a fixed link. A faster, more reliable link is certainly attractive in terms of tourism and trade, and it is argued that the impact on our economic and social life could be beneficial, but many people within and outside the House are not persuaded that these matters have been properly assessed. I believe that it is better to reach the right decision with the widest public participation and knowledge than to reach the wrong decision in haste and have to repent at leisure. When we debated proposals for the Okehampton bypass recently, several hon. Members, some of whom are here today, insisted that the route could not possibly be shifted from the south to the north of Okehampton without a full public inquiry because—and I was chastised by the Secretary of State—that would be attempting to ride roughshod over the rights of individuals. How then can we take a decision of such magnitude as the fixed link, which will affect the whole country, without a full public

inquiry? I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby today to make it clear that we must have a public inquiry so as to arrive at a reasoned decision.

5.19 pm

Mr. Peter Rees (Dover): I find myself on tenuous common ground with the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) in welcoming this debate. I cannot pretend that the subject has not been keenly debated in east Kent. I am, however, old-fashioned enough to believe that this is the place to develop a complex case and deliver a considered view. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North has had a difficult job to reconcile the various different interests in his party and I admire the dexterity with which he has endeavoured to reconcile the views of the National Union of Seamen and the National Union of Railwaymen. However, I found his speech curiously unsatisfactory and I was left a little uncertain as to the exact official position of the Labour party on this issue.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Speak for Dover.

Mr. John Prescott: Speak for Dover.

Mr. Rees: Yes, I intend to speak for Dover. I hope I will evoke an echo from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) who has a keen interest in maritime matters. I do not know how these questions affect the hon. Gentleman, but he may catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the debate, and show his deep understanding of maritime matters.

I also find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North in offering my respectful congratulations to the Select Committee. Although I do not agree with all its conclusions, they have in the short time done a remarkably thorough job.

This subject has exercised a compelling fascination for over two centuries, and in the careers of many hon. Members it has once before become a matter of debate and legislation. Relics of earlier endeavours are to be found almost exclusively in my constituency. I recall vividly the winter of 1974-75, when I stood in the mouth of the tunnel and watched the large boring machine which was about to start work. I have personal and constituency interests in this question.

I also claim, I hope without arrogance, that my constituency is the one most directly affected by this project. This may be a matter of friendly rivalry between myself and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) who I am glad to see assiduously seated in his place. We know he is a stout champion of his constituency interests. We regret that the conventions of public life will deny him the opportunity of giving us his views tonight.

I am aware that this is a national issue. I am not insensitive to the case for having competing and alternative methods of crossing the Channel. As my right hon. Friend the Minister has pointed out, the continental countries of the Community are our biggest and fastest developing export market. It must be right to equip our exporters with the most effective and cheapest means of getting their exports into that market. A large proportion of our Armed Forces are stationed on the Rhine and it is right that, in any foreseeable circumstances, there must be the best means of supporting and reinforcing them. However, I shall leave the national issues to other right

[Mr. Rees]

hon. and hon. Members, as I wish to concentrate on the effects upon east Kent, on the questions on which I and so many of my constituents will need reassurance.

The first issue is the future of the ferries, which the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North dealt with in a remarkably cursory fashion despite the powerful assistance at his right hand from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. This issue has to be considered against the background of the contraction of the merchant marine. I would be out of order if I were to develop that interesting and important theme.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): It is a national issue.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) will return to that in his closing remarks and perhaps go beyond the question of a public inquiry.

I believe that the crossing of the Channel should not become the monopoly right of one means of transport. I hope that that will find a sympathetic echo from right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Front Bench. I recall the position in which the Government considered the European Ferries bid some years ago for one of the rival operators. It is crucial for the good of the country that there should not be a tendency to a monopoly, that there should be ample scope for the ferries and that there should be fair competition. Whichever form of fixed link crossing is chosen by the French and British Governments, if, indeed, one is, they should not be permitted or encouraged to embark on a policy of predatory pricing which might drive the ferries away from Dover. It is important that the high standards of safety which are rightly expected of the ferries should also be expected of the operators of any form of fixed link.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is sensitive to the issue of the environment and I look forward to welcoming him to my constituency in a few days time. My constituency contains the fairest coastline of any part of Britain. That may be the most controversial contribution I shall make to this debate. It is important that, when my hon. Friend the Minister chooses the form of fixed link, it will not devastate the white cliffs, or make a hideous inroad into Shakespeare cliff and that the downlands behind are protected.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister assures me of the improvement of the A2, the M20 and the A20. I remind the House that Dover is one of the few major ports—it is the major roll-on/roll-off port—which does not have a direct connection from a motorway right to the gates of the port. If this great project goes ahead, will my right hon. Friend the Minister be able to assure me that the A2-M2 will be improved to serve Dover harbour? Can my hon. Friend the Minister assure me that, as soon as the decision has been taken on the fixed link, the M20-A20 extension will be approved and its routing and connection determined.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am exceedingly grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way. Is he aware that the *Folkestone, Hythe and District Herald* has been running a questionnaire of its readers as the paper is concerned that the public's views should be known? The public were asked what would be the effect of the fixed link on the towns. Two thousand three hundred

and thirty five returned the questionnaire and of them, 2 per cent. said it would have a good effect and 98 per cent. thought it would have a bad effect in Dover.

Mr. Rees: I am sure that the hon. Lady will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in due course.

Mr. Prescott: She is speaking for Dover.

Mr. Rees: I was aware that the hon. Lady had had an opportunity to visit my constituency, but she was then as equivocal as the hon. Member for Aberdeen North on the central issue. It is all very well to scratch about in the local press, but we would like her direct view. The *Folkestone, Hythe and District Herald* may have a modest sale in Dover but it does not have quite the same salt as the *Dover Express* or the *East Kent Mercury*. If the hon. Lady revisits my constituency she will learn where to put her trust and where to form her views.

We are anxious about lateral communications, which are more the responsibility of Kent county council. Its initial costing of the likely improvements necessary is about £75 million. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider with tenderness, sympathy and generosity any case that it might advance.

Rail links are essentially a national issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) played a notable role in the last project and will no doubt voice his fears on this aspect of the project. There is a fear, which I hope is not well justified, that when there is a fixed link and a fast rail connection between the metropolitan cities of France and Britain, the concerns of people living on each side will be overlooked. It is important that the same level of services to Dover, Thanet and Canterbury is maintained or even improved.

It will not have escaped the attention of those hon. Members who have considered the issue that our French neighbours are pouring considerable resources into the Pas de Calais. That is partly explained because, I believe, it is a depressed area, and because, legitimately, there is friendly rivalry between the Pas de Calais and east Kent. They hope, properly, to take advantage of any fixed link that is built to draw industrial and economic activity there rather than to leave it to develop in east Kent, where I believe it should be. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends and others concerned with these matters will devote considerable attention to our anxiety on that score. Perhaps on some other occasion I may develop the case for turning Dover into an enterprise zone or a freeport. There will of course be rivalry from both sides of the House for similar attentions, but as Dover will bear the brunt of any fixed link, its prospects for development and growth should be safeguarded. It should not be merely a site for construction and construction workers during any building phase.

The need for a public inquiry has exercised the minds of many. Justice demands that all those with a legitimate interest which might be affected by the project should be permitted to give their evidence and have it weighed and evaluated by a body independent of the Executive. A hybrid Bill might meet that test, as there would be a Select Committee of this House and another Select Committee of the other place. There is some anxiety on this score; I remember pressing the point on a Labour Transport Minister in the 1974 Government. The restrictions and limitations on those who might give evidence to such a Select Committee should be drawn generously. The rules

of relevance should not be drawn so tightly that those with a genuine point to make are shut out. I hope that my right hon. Friend will insist upon any successful consortium entering into consultation and negotiation with local authorities and other interested parties about the likely course of its operations. On that basis, justice could be done on that score as well. It is a matter of considerable concern in east Kent and, I believe, elsewhere.

Mr. Ridley: The Court of Referees decides status in conjunction with any Select Committee, so it is beyond the Government's hand to decide who will appear before a hybrid Bill Select Committee. I give the undertaking that the Government will not try in any way to restrict or reduce those who have status, in so far as it is within our power to do so. It will be a matter for the House.

Mr. Rees: I am grateful for that assurance. I am a little unclear about whether the Government would be regarded as the promoter or whether the promoter will be the successful consortium. I believe that the promoter has a certain standing in this matter. If it is the Government, I hope that they will be generous and allow a wide range of interests to present their case. If the promoter is the successful consortium, I hope that my right hon. Friend will impose a condition on it not to take a too restrictive view.

The previous hybrid Bill on this topic was introduced by the 1974 Labour Government. I have turned up the relevant records and find that I pressed Ministers on the point that I have just made. I also found that, on 26 November 1974, the late Anthony Crosland, for whom all of us had a great regard and respect, was pressed about a public inquiry. He said:

"In my view this is not a subject which ought to be farmed out to a conventional public inquiry. This is a subject on which the final decision can be taken in only one place, and that is in Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 1974; Vol. 882, c. 248.]

He rejected a public inquiry.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the right hon. and learned Member concede that the late Anthony Crosland initiated many public inquiries and that the hybrid Bill of 1974 was on a much smaller scale and had limited application, whereas this one embraces four schemes?

Mr. Rees: We do not know. The hon. Gentleman is anticipating which scheme will find favour with the French and British Governments.

Mr. Hughes: No, I am not.

Mr. Rees: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue.

The general principle is as stated by Anthony Crosland. My basic principle is that the evidence should be given freely to and evaluated by a body independent of the Executive. No body is more independent of the Executive than a Select Committee of this House or a Select Committee of the other place. If, by his slightly tawdry request for a public inquiry, the hon. Gentleman means an inquiry undertaken by an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, he will remember that such an inspector reports to the Secretary of State, who takes the final decision. I do not believe that that is what the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's difficulties on this great issue. The distinguished great grandfather of my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill)

said that it was the duty of an Opposition to oppose. However, the Opposition have to be a little more fastidious about their grounds for opposing the Government. If anything were to put me into the same Lobby as the Government, it is the Opposition's rather shabby behaviour.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Try harder.

Mr. Rees: Allow me to state my position. Many issues will remain unresolved tonight. That is inevitable, as no decision as to the form of fixed link has been taken yet. However, to emphasise the legitimate concern of many of my constituents and myself and to emphasise the importance that I attach to the issues that I have outlined, I cannot do other than vote against the Government's position tonight.

5.40 pm

Mr. John Silkin (Lewisham, Deptford): I think that we all had a great deal of sympathy with the right hon. and learned Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) in the dilemma in which he found himself. I congratulate him on the eloquence which he deployed in his struggle to get off its horns. I can only tell him that his difficulties were very apparent to my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have no doubt that they were to Conservative Members.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) opened the debate on behalf of the Opposition, he referred, rightly, to the short time that the existence of the debate has been known to the House and the country. We are all well aware that the Department of Transport's press office was telling us a short time ago that there would be no such debate as there was no need for one. Suddenly, the Leader of the House, whose judgment can be extremely wise, decided that the issue should be aired. Nevertheless, notice has been short. I am not making a point against the Secretary of State for Transport necessarily—

Mr. Anderson: Why not?

Mr. Silkin: I shall make my observations in due course. My hon. Friend need not worry about that. A two-day debate would have been rather better, and the fact that 28 right hon. and hon. Members wish to contribute to this debate rather reinforces that view.

Short notice was a problem that the Select Committee on Transport had also to face. I cannot take up the praise that the right hon. and learned Member for Dover lavished on the Transport Committee. The Committee was given 16 days in which to produce a report and its report shows every mark of having been produced in ill haste and without proper consideration having been given. Paragraph 16 of the report reads:

"The Committee has not been able, nor indeed has it attempted, to subject either the technical, economic or financial aspects of the proposals to the kind of detailed scrutiny which is appropriate for a project of such magnitude and significance". However, 16 days later it thought that it was capable of giving its decision.

At paragraph 28.6 the Select Committee sets out in detail the organisations which have complained about lack of consultation. The list includes quite powerful and prestigious groups such as the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation, Friends of the Earth, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and Transport 2000. All these

[Mr. Silkin]

organisations have stressed the need for a public inquiry. The Select Committee gives no reasons for not being in favour of a public inquiry beyond the fact that "the idea of a fixed Channel link is not new".

On that basis, one would want no discussion at all. Apparently the Secretary of State is entirely unaware—he had to be informed of the fact by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross)—that any ensuing jobs might not come to our people. The jobs in question might go to those abroad. I asked the right hon. Gentleman about the number of jobs that would be available—I thought that he must have made some assessment of the number, even in global terms—or that would be lost as a result of the project, and he was unable to answer my question. He said that that information would come out later as investigations took place. Where is the best place to investigate such matters? There is no question that the best place to air such considerations would be at a public inquiry.

When the right hon. and learned Member for Dover quoted my friend—Tony Crosland—he was a friend of many of us—he deliberately slurred over one important word. Tony Crosland said that he was against the idea of a conventional public inquiry. The idea of an inspector treating the construction of a Channel link as a small planning matter that should go ultimately to the Minister for his decision is obviously one that is inappropriate. I am well aware of that because at one time I had ministerial responsibilities for planning. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, would not have considered allowing such a project to go ahead without a public inquiry. Indeed, my right hon. Friend instituted the Windscale inquiry.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: And there was Sizewell.

Mr. Silkin: Indeed, but my right hon. Friend was not responsible for that. The Select Committee on Transport was guilty of unseemly haste. It galloped through the exercise in 16 days. That was asking for trouble and I suspect that trouble is what it will get.

If the process of consultation has been zero, which it has, should not full information have been made available to the whole country? The Secretary of State has tried to tell us that it was, but many of us think otherwise. National newspapers, *Folkestone Expresses* and *Dover Expresses* have been quoted, and I shall quote from a journal which perhaps the right hon. Gentleman does not know about but of which he should be aware when he goes on his travels next week. *News in Focus* covers the Tonbridge area, and Tonbridge will be a vital rail link if we have a Channel tunnel, or anything that provides a rail link that leads to the capital.

On 26 November, *News in Focus* undertook, somewhat unusually, a little investigative journalism. It decided to investigate what information was available for the Tonbridge area and found that the only place at which information could be obtained was the legal and administrative department at Tonbridge town hall in Tonbridge. Information could be obtained from that source on request. *News in Focus* made the request and it was supplied with four incomplete brochures, and that was all. That was public consultation.

The journalist who was engaged on this project read through the incomplete brochures. I shall quote from "Euroroute" because it illustrates the point that *News in Focus* was trying to make. The document reads:

"Euroroute devotes some attention to public consultation. Anyone wishing to test that premise would find it difficult. There is no address to which comments can be sent. Neither is there a comments book on hand in which to register approval or disapproval".

The Department of Transport can be acquitted on that score. At the place to which one goes to be consulted, there is a book in which comments can be written. It seems that not very many members of the public have been "consulted". When I asked the messengers to take me to the consultation area, they burst into laughter. They told me that a few members of the public had made a similar request and that most of them had written in the comments book. I do not suppose that the Secretary of State has visited the Department's consultation area, so I shall inform him and the House of the comments that have been made.

The first comment takes the form of a question and asks, "Is this a joke?". The second comment is, "An insult to intelligence". The third quote is "Sham" and the fourth is "Very poor". The fifth comment reads "Dear Minister, this is a farce", and the sixth states "As a means of providing information to the general public on a matter of obvious public concern, this is pathetic".

Sir John Wells (Maidstone): I have never heard of the newspaper from which the right hon. Gentleman has quoted. Secondly, is he aware that Maidstone is the county town of Kent, and that all information that could possibly be required by him and anyone in the Tonbridge area could be readily obtained in Maidstone, both from the county hall and the town hall? If people go to the wrong place, it is not surprising that they get the wrong information.

Mr. Silkin: I think that the hon. Gentleman is quite right. The journalist of *News in Focus* telephoned the Department of Transport to ask where he could find the information that had been made available. He was told that it was available in Maidstone, Dover and Folkestone. The Department's spokesman added that he could find the information everywhere in Kent, including Tonbridge. The hon. Member for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells) has told us that he has never heard of *News in Focus*, and it may be that he has not heard of the Department of Transport either.

The room in which the Department has its public consultation material—this was the cause of much ribald laughter on the part of the Department's messengers—is 11 ft. by 8 ft. There were three summaries of the scheme. Apparently the one on the bridge has been stolen. I asked when it would be replaced and the answer was never. To compensate for this lack of information on the schemes, there are over 50 copies of *Mobile and Holiday Homes*. I regret to tell hon. Members who wish to see the exhibition that they are in for a disappointment. It closed on Friday. They cannot see it today.

I have no doubt that hon. Members will refer to defence, economics, employment and health. We are limited in time so I shall restrict myself to the environmental factors that arise. We cannot limit this matter by saying that it is a national matter, and that we should therefore forget environmental factors because they only affect people locally. They are the heritage of us all.

The coast that the right hon. and learned Member for Dover and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry have the honour to represent is known as the heritage coast, because it is the heritage of each one of us.

The Select Committee on Transport when it was dealing with the environment correctly analysed the matter not as between one group and another, but as between one site and another. However, it missed the most important point of conservation. First, it dealt with the Shakespeare cliff. The four schemes deal with that area. I do not know whether there are bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover, but if any of the schemes gets going there will be a hell of a mess underneath the cliffs and it will not be the bluebirds' fault, it will be the fault of all the work that will have been done there. That is clear from every report. There is no doubt that it is our heritage that is being destroyed and broken into.

There are a number of sites involved. One of them is Dungeness. It is one of the best known bird sanctuaries. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds regards it as an extremely important site for that reason.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Dungeness is best known as a reserve for nuclear power stations.

Mr. Silkin: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will listen to me because there is an important point here of which I do not think he is aware. It is important that the site be considered environmentally and Euroroute considers it. It says that the RSPB does not object to Euroroute's plan for spoil disposal, which could, of course, destroy bird life altogether. That has been denied by the RSPB. It says that it objects to the scheme and has told Euroroute so. The RSPB says that the Channel Tunnel Group approached it and asked whether it had any objection and it said that it had. The Channel Tunnel Group does not refer to that point in its report. At least it does not tell the untruth that Euroroute tells. If Euroroute is prepared to tell that untruth, how many other untruths are included in the schemes? That is something with which a public inquiry might have the chance to deal.

Another environmental point is one that the Secretary of State never mentioned. He has perhaps never heard of it. It is marine pollution. The tunnel spoil—the figures are quoted in the reports—amounts to 4 million cu m. If we study what the Channel Tunnel Group says we can see that it does not have the faintest idea of what to do with 1 million cu m of spoil. One of the options that it rejects is to put it into the sea. The effect of that would be appalling. It says that it will not do that. When the economic pressures begin to be a little strong, when it is trying to cut corners and save money—it has been done before—it might do so.

In addition, the seepage results in the loss of 33 million litres of brackish water a day. That is about 7.25 million gallons. There is no suggestion of how that is to be coped with. It is seeping out the whole time and destroying marine life.

The Channel tunnel Group mentions one other matter in paragraph 5.3.2:

"The possibility of hazardous freight spillage means that chemicals potentially harmful to the marine environment could also be discharged from the work area."

All those points are mentioned. The problems are known. Nowhere does it say what the solutions are, because they

are not known. Those matters may all be taken care of in due course. They are all strong arguments for holding a public inquiry.

The final point relates to fish. There does not appear to be an input from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and it is rather important that there should be. The most important fisheries laboratory is at Burnham-on-Crouch. It has experience only of the small amount of sand displacement that comes with dredging. It has experimented on that but not on anything of the scale that we are discussing.

There are redeeming features. At paragraph 7.63 Euroroute tells us:

"Because currents in the centre of the Straits of Dover are strong and the bottom is smooth and scoured, sedentary organisms"—

that means cockles, mussels, whelks and so on—

"living along one coast may be unable to reach the opposite one even if their mobile larval stages have a long enough free-swimming life. Piers of the bridge section crossing inshore waters may not only provide additional solid surfaces for the attachment of marine organisms already present, but also stepping stones towards the opposite coast."

Think of it, all the cockles and whelks from Britain will be able to go on package holidays to France and vice versa. Is that serious or does it come from Alice in Wonderland? I think that it is Alice in Wonderland and that the Secretary of State has probably forgotten the "lobster quadrille".

"What matters it how far we go",

His scaly friend replied.

'There is another shore you know

Upon the other side.

The further off from England,

The nearer is to France'."

It is astonishing. When a serious study of fish is done, what about this:

"Further study will be required to establish the importance of this stretch."—

That relates to the heritage coast—

"as a spawning area for plaice and sole."

No one knows what damage will be done. Euroroute continues:

"Figure 7.5 shows the distribution of the major spawning grounds (of herring) in the region of the Straits of Dover as they were in the period of the 1950s and 1960s."

There is no more recent information.

In 1976, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) well recalls, he and I had to take unilateral, national action to stop the complete destruction of herring. The subsequent Tory Government gave up the unilateral right. We no longer have it.

After an absolute ban of some years the herring is beginning to recover and return. What will be done with it now if we go ahead with the scheme? No one knows. There is a complete lack of information.

I said that I would avoid matters apart from the environment and I intend to do so, with the exception of one small but rather vital point. A number of us have had some dealings with the French. They contribute much to civilisation and culture, and we love them dearly. However, Silkin's 11th and 12th law of politics tells us this: first, if something is of economic advantage to the French it is most unlikely that it is of the slightest economic advantage to this country. Secondly, if the French ever find that something turns out not to be of economic advantage to them, they will ruthlessly cut it out, whereas we will go to the end.

I recommend to the Secretary of State for Transport—I am sure that he would enjoy it—a trip to Avignon.

[Mr. Silkin]

There, along the river Rhone stands the bridge of St. Bénézet, abandoned half-way across the river because of its appalling cost—a reminder of a vainglorious project which ran out of money long before it reached the other side of the water.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The House will be aware that a large number of hon. Members wish to speak. I repeat Mr. Speaker's appeal for brevity.

5.59 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I shall do my best to follow your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall come straight to the point and declare myself to be a total agnostic on the Channel fixed link question. I make no ideological stand. I do not regard a Channel fixed link as a necessary symbol of Britain's commitment to the European Community—indeed, it would be a highly expensive symbol—nor, conversely, does our continuing failure to build such a Channel fixed link guarantee our national independence. I take a simple and down-to-earth approach. I shall ask a number of questions.

Will a Channel fixed link improve significantly the efficiency and comfort, and reduce the cost, of the transportation of people and freight between the myriad of places in the United Kingdom and the myriad of places on the mainland of Europe to which one might be minded to go or to move freight? How reliable would such a fixed link be? What are the security risks? What are the dangers of monopoly pricing? That last question is one that the Select Committee did not consider in any detail. Will the fixed link create undesirable side effects? What will be the effect on the environment? The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin) dealt with a few of those aspects. Above all, who will pay?

I need not remind the House that one does not get a Channel bridge or tunnel for free. Even if the Treasury refuses to bank the proposal, the nation will still pay. I therefore ask an obvious question which is often ignored because it is so obvious: what is wrong with the current cross-Channel services by air and, above all, by sea? I look forward to an improvement in sea passage due to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in getting free cabotage rights for British coastal vessels along the EEC coast. The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford was right about the French in this regard. If they wish to improve communications, they should immediately give us cabotage rights along the French coast.

What is the matter with our present arrangements? The ferry companies have a good record. They have continued to offer a wide range of services geared to the changing needs of their different customers 364 days a year through 11 ports in Britain and 16 in continental Europe. In their document "Flexilink", which we have all received in recent days, the ferry companies have stated the opportunities that are open to them for further development, provided we do not go ahead with a major fixed link. Obviously, it would be rash of the ferry companies to put capital into improving ferry services if there is to be a major new competitor.

I remind the House of what our former colleague Keith Wickenden told the Select Committee on Transport in

1981. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford would not be more censorious about that much more thorough inquiry than he has been about the current one. The report states that Mr. Wickenden

"showed considerable confidence in the ability of existing modes to cope with increased traffic and drew attention to the greatly improved efficiency of the latest generation of cross-Channel ferries which would lead both to greater profitability and a greater ability to compete with other services, including a fixed link."

Mr. Adley: Surprise, surprise.

Sir David Price: The current Select Committee on Transport has discovered that that is exactly what has been happening. What Keith Wickenden said four years ago is happening now. We do not have a static situation. Improvement is not dependent on the establishment of a fixed link. It is important for the House to recognise that, if a fixed link is operated successfully, most of our ferry services would cease to be commercially viable. Of course, if it is not operated successfully, a fixed link would be an unmitigated disaster.

Lest there be any doubt about what I am saying, I invite the House to look at the handout from Mr. Sherwood who is the promoter not only of ferries but of one of the four options offered to us. He states:

"British Ferries believes that no multi-purpose ferries will survive the competition of the Channel Expressway on the routes between south-east England and the Ostend-Boulogne range of ports, although small day tripper boats offering duty free goods might find a limited market."

Let us be under no illusions—if we go ahead with any of the current fixed link proposals, we shall on the whole be saying goodbye to our ferry services, with all that that entails not only for our merchant marine but for back-up for our defence forces.

Who wants to go from Dover to Calais? Unlike our late lamented Queen Mary Tudor, I suspect that few of us when we go for our post mortems will be found to have the word "Calais" engraved on our hearts. Surely we want something very different. We want to improve the efficiency and convenience of a multitude of journeys, actual and potential, at lower real cost and greater convenience between a great range of starting points in Britain and an even greater range of destinations on the mainland of Europe. For many such journeys currently undertaken, Dover and Calais are irrelevant, so why create unnecessarily a Dover-Calais funnel through which most of the freight and people crossing the Channel will have to be squeezed? I sympathise with the good people of Kent in their apprehensions about the consequences on them of this geographical corset. I have yet to be convinced that my constituents in Eastleigh will travel cheaper, quicker or more comfortably through the corset of Dover and Calais than by the existing air and ferry services.

Although I clearly remain unconvinced — being unpersuaded — of the overwhelming merits of any particular scheme for a fixed link connection, I shall not deny to the proponents of individual fixed link schemes the right to make their case. If their case is overwhelming, it would be wrong for us not to afford them the necessary legislation. That is why I was able to agree with the views of my colleagues on the Select Committee on Transport in 1981 when the report stated:

"If it can be demonstrated that a fixed link could be profitable and would lead to increased competition and improved services to passengers and freight operators, we see no reason why Parliament or the Government should stand in its way. Although

it should not be the function of Parliament to give subsidised support to a new form of Channel crossing which would undermine the profitability of existing modes, it is equally not the role of Parliament to prevent the development of new modes which would fairly compete with existing operators, even if some existing operators were to suffer in consequence."

Nothing has happened in the past four years to change my judgment of that evaluation of the way in which we should all look at these schemes.

I think that we could all agree that there is no overwhelming case—at least I have not read one yet—in favour of any of the proposals. Bridges are clearly not on. The idea of bridges across the Channel push the current state of the bridge building art beyond reasonable risk. The Eurobridge would be three times the length of the longest suspension bridge at present open anywhere in the world, crossing one of the most heavily used and liveliest seaways in the world. As far as I am concerned, the Eurobridge proposal is strictly for the birds.

The same applies to the splendidly eccentric idea of the Euroroute. The kindest thing that I can do for that proposal is to invite the promoters to study the Goodwin sands, learn what happens to islands and sand banks in the English Channel and learn about the ability of mariners—recorded since the days of Julius Caesar—to pile on them.

This leaves only the Channel tunnel project and the Channel Expressway as starters, but I believe that they should remain just that—starters.

I realise that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will have to meet President Mitterrand and settle which project, if any, both Governments would support. I suggest that she might find the following lines from one of Voltaire's discourses helpful:

"First character: "Il faut que je vive"—

I must live—

"Second character: 'Je n'en vois la nécessité'—

I do not see the necessity. That is my view on all four proposals. Je n'en vois la nécessité. I do not see the necessity.

6.10 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I have found today's speeches bitterly disappointing. Where is the spirit of Brunel? I support the fixed Channel link, although I should prefer it to be a rail-only link, as I said in 1974. The late Tony Crosland said then that that was not realistic and that we must have a car element. That is one of the schemes which is still before us.

I recognise that, since the project is to be built with private money, it is not acceptable to promote a rail-only scheme. I accept the conditions set by the Government and I support the creation of a fixed link to France. A permanent thoroughfare between our islands and Europe is in the best economic interests of our country. That applies not only to the south-east but to every part of our country—the north-east, Scotland, the north-west, Northern Ireland, Wales and even the Isle of Wight.

I should like the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) to stand with me on a miserable Sunday afternoon at the bottom of Highgate hill and Archway so that we can watch the lorries merging from all parts of the country. They pour down the route to Dover. We are presented with an opportunity to put that traffic on rail.

As a member of the Select Committee on Transport, I had the advantage of having attended explanatory presentations of the four schemes which meet the two

Governments' guidelines. I was unable to be present at the final meeting, which was rushed. Two of us were missing. I confirm that I support the majority recommendation, as did the other missing member, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris). There was thus a seven to four split in favour of the Channel Tunnel Company's scheme.

That does not mean that I did not find much to attract me in the Channel Expressway proposal. A drive-through tunnel has much to recommend it if it is technically feasible, particularly in relation to the damage to the Kent countryside—although, even with that proposal, a substantial holding area will be necessary in the event of accident, bad weather or breakdown and for customs and duty-free facilities.

The Sunday papers give the Sherwood scheme a substantial boost but the Committee did not make that its first choice, on expert advice. We were told:

"Even for the most optimistic expectations for control of traffic, fluctuations will cause variations in air flow at the intermediate ventilation shaft and the proposals are right to the limit of capacity without allowance for that effect. Detailed examination of the scheme would almost certainly expose other deficiencies, including effects of links between the two tunnels (stated to be at 500 metres intervals) unless these are totally closed."

The Secretary of State's experts will have to examine that. No 31-mile long road-only tunnel exists. The proposed tunnel is at least double the length of any similar existing tunnel. The proposition must be thoroughly investigated.

The estimated cost relative to other suggested schemes is questionable. The original concept has changed from a pair of joint-based tunnels for rail and road to separate tunnels for each, including a twin rail tunnel, which is certainly a great improvement. That proposition was not put to the Select Committee.

The fixed Channel link should offer a great opportunity to our much-maligned railway industry. I hope that we receive firm assurances today that no scheme will be approved unless it provides at the outset for a through rail connection to be built and to be in operation by not later than the opening of the roadway. Euroroute did not originally make such a promise, although it has changed its ground since October.

There appears to be a £100 million gap between the BR/SNCF proposal and the requirements of Euroroute. That must be filled somehow.

I see a real chance for the revitalisation of our rail network through a direct link into Europe, both for passengers and freight. However, we must ensure that British Rail has adequate capital resources to compete on equal terms with the French who have invested so much more in their rail network in recent years.

A recent *Guardian* article was headed:

"Anger as British Rail puts Chunnel into siding."

It stated:

"Whichever option is chosen British Rail will have to invest a further £350 million in new rolling stock and station facilities at Ashford in Kent, and Waterloo."

The article points out some of the charges which promoters will expect to receive from British Rail. We need to know whether the Government intend to provide adequate resources for British Rail above those which have already been provided under the present limitation on capital expenditure which reduces year by year. We hope that British Rail will be able to regard this as separate business on which it can rely for further Government assistance.

[Mr. Stephen Ross]

British Rail designers must be able to match the French all the way, or we might face another takeover bid. That might involve looking to private builders and British Rail leasing back. We must get our fair share of what is on offer and not hand it on a plate to the French.

As the Secretary of State admitted, contracts involving about 1 million ecus will have to go out to tender under EEC rules. British firms should be in the best position to obtain those contracts, but they will face competition. I expect our contractors to win because they are on the spot, but the contracts have to be offered and that proviso must be made.

Local consultation is a difficult question. I agree with the Select Committee that a public inquiry on the lines of Sizewell is a non-starter. That was the view of the late Tony Crosland who, none the less announced in 1974 that all relevant objectors to the proposal should be heard by the Committee. The Select Committee on Transport strongly recommends the same procedure this time, and I support that view. Paragraph 27 of our report set that out.

We have heard speeches on the issue from the right hon. and learned Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) and others. The citizens of Kent are extremely worried, rightly, as are politicians and prospective candidates in that part of the country. Their anxiety is understandable. When the Secretary of State visits Folkestone and Dover next week, he will see for himself the scale of the concern. Many questions will be put to him, particularly about environmental matters.

I appreciate that the Secretary of State went a long way in his speech today to try to reassure us and to explain exactly how the rights of petitioners will be protected under the hybrid Bill procedure.

I wish to put to the right hon. Gentleman the proposal made by John Macdonald, QC, a prospective candidate for Folkestone. He suggested to the Select Committee that a limited local inquiry be set up. He recommended that a person such as the chairman of the Bar Council or a lawyer of comparable experience should be appointed to conduct the inquiry. He said that 20 days should be set aside for the evidence. He thought that that would be sufficient time to test the proposals submitted.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The hon. Gentleman has, rightly, expressed the concern of people living in the coastal area of Kent and others who will be directly affected. What reassurance can he give to those who have worries about what will happen to the economy of the north-east of England and of Scotland as a result of these developments?

Mr. Ross: I thought I had dealt with that. The building of this link will improve the economy of Great Britain Limited. It is time that we got on with schemes of this sort. One need only think of some of the great schemes of the last century that were good for our economy. The Prime Minister claims to want a return to Victorian ideals. There were some great engineers in the last century, and I am willing to back their modern counterparts to the hilt. I began my remarks by urging the nation to return to the spirit of Brunel. The benefits from this link will wash off into Scotland and the north-east, from where the greatest engineers come. There will be work for all.

We could conduct a short sharp inquiry which would at least give local people the chance to express their views.

That would be preferable to asking people to come to this building and sit in a corridor in the House of Lords waiting to be called. That is a frightening experience, as I know from the remarks of constituents of mine who have done just that. We are suggesting that a barrister or other senior lawyer should be appointed to conduct an inquiry, with legal aid available to those who wish to make representations. Such an inquiry, if it started in January, could be over by 31 March.

As a leading article in *The Observer* rightly pointed out yesterday:

"Having decided to fix the link, let's give ourselves time to pick the best way."

I would add to that: and to give what assurance we can, not only to local people but to people throughout Britain who fear that, once again, all the investment will go to what they claim to be the wealthy south-east. In fact, it is not all that wealthy. For example, unemployment in my constituency is near 18 per cent. and places such as Margate are suffering greatly from unemployment.

In the long run, a fixed rail and road link will help this country's economy. I do not take the view that the ferry services from the north-east, the east coast and Portsmouth and Plymouth will close. They will remain, although what will happen in Dover, Folkestone and Margate is in the lap of the gods. It is understandable that the people in those areas should worry about whether they will lose their jobs or not; I hope that, when the Secretary of State visits those constituencies next week, he will listen to their fears and try to allay them. If a short, sharp local inquiry is needed, let us give ourselves time to conduct one.

6.22 pm

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): I agree with the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) that there are fears about the local consultation process, although I do not accept that the sort of local inquiry he has in mind would be the answer. I cannot imagine such an inquiry being completed in 20 days; 200 days would be nearer the time required. I have a few suggestions to make about the way in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport might solve some of the problems.

I hope that we are not wasting our time by debating the issue now. I have been worried by some press reports and even by some of the Prime Minister's bullish remarks that seem to give the impression that it is all over bar the shouting and that a decision in principle has been made.

If we are to have assessors of the competence and calibre of Freeman Fox and Schroders, to name but two, it is clear that the Department of Transport and the House will wish to take fully into account their findings on the environmental impact, the financial and technical consequences and the other criteria that the Government have laid down for the differing schemes. It would be inconceivable that, if they found that all the schemes did not match up to those criteria, the Government would bulldoze the House into accepting a scheme that did not meet their criteria.

When the assessments have been concluded with the Department of Transport, I hope that the findings will be available for public scrutiny in a digested form—I accept that there will be a great mass of paper—perhaps as appendices to the White Paper that will be issued. The country has a right to see what the independent experts say

about the four schemes. We are entitled to that information, not least because, as taxpayers, we are paying for the assessments.

I have a strong complaint to make. Other hon. Members have referred to the issue, but not in as strong a way as I propose to cavil about it. My complaint is that the promoters are moving the goal posts although the game has already started. I received, dated 31 October, a great deal of information from the various promoters. It was also, of course, sent to the Secretary of State. The information on the Sealink Channel Expressway—what I say applies to other schemes, too—stated on the first page of the submission to my right hon. Friend:

"British Ferries Limited, the promoters of the scheme, considered carefully the options of constructing independent single or double-track tunnels to accommodate rail traffic, but at the end of the day the economic case for combining rail and road in the same tunnels was too compelling to choose one of the separate rail tunnel options."

We all know what has happened since then. Indeed, on the evening of 13 November, several of my hon. Friends and I had dinner with Mr. Sherwood, the chairman of that company, at which he gave assurances—we have received similar assurances from other people—that the various submissions had been sent in. But there have now been changes.

The important point is not that hon. Members have been misled. My remarks apply equally to the Euroroute proposals which, originally provided for a submerged rail tunnel some years after the building of a bridge, whereas now apparently it is to be a bored tunnel at the same time as the building of a bridge. Both Channel Expressway's and Euroroute's schemes may be better than the schemes originally envisaged, but Kent county council and my constituents have been assessing the schemes on the basis of what they were told in the 31 October submissions. The Kent county surveyor, reporting on the not unimportant business of the disposal of spoil, said:

"Channel Expressway have a far greater spoil disposal problem, some 6.5 million cubic metres. No firm proposals are made, and the cursory attention to this enormous problem in logistics as to train transportation (10 trains a day for four years?), let alone disposal locations, is unsatisfactory. Expectations of possible chalk quarry filling or to former aggregate workings at Dungeness are inadequately examined and could result in very significant adverse environmental impact from the activity."

That was said before it was proposed to bore a separate rail tunnel, which means that that company has doubled its spoil problem.

I trust that the environmental impact assessments that are being carried out by the Department are taking into account the latest proposals that have come in after 31 October for Euroroute, Expressway and for any changes in other routes that other promoters may have made. It is difficult for our constituents, who are trying to grapple with these major problems in a short time, particularly the local authorities, to get to grips with the issues involved when such significant changes are being proposed.

I make these remarks not to knock a particular scheme but to show that some hon. Members and our constituents feel that we are being bulldozed into agreeing to something simply to meet an international date that has been fixed irrespective of the merits of the scheme. As the Minister who moved the original tunnel measure 11 years ago and who believes basically in the concept of a fixed link,

subject to some strong and important reservations, I claim that what is happening in connection with those changes is fundamentally wrong.

What questions should we be asking in considering the various schemes? The first question is whether a scheme is needed, when in the first eight months of this year 520,000 heavy lorries went through Dover. Those of us who live in Kent know only too well that that number is increasing all the time. There has been an enormous growth in car and lorry traffic.

Secondly, we must ask whether, if we are to have a scheme, it should result in a monopoly or whether there should be competition. Any scheme that drives surface routes away from, say, Newhaven to Harwich would result in a monopoly situation, and that would not be in anybody's interest, least of all the consumer and British industry.

Thirdly, are we sure that no public money is involved? Extra investment will be needed outside the particular links. My figure for the rail investment for British Rail is £390 million. I want a 100 per cent. secure financial guarantee from the promoters that if, for whatever reason, they have to abandon the scheme, there will be enough money to abandon it safely and properly. This must be looked at, and no doubt is being looked at, by the Department of Transport.

We hope that the links can provide a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week service unaffected by weather and the problems in the Channel to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) and others have referred. There would be a substantial advantage in maintaining the continuity of service. We sometimes forget that transport is an extension of the production lines of our industries, and that we must export to live.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, as I did when he came to Ashford, that whether or not we like it, and whether or not a link comes, the existing road system in Kent needs massive improvement. I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about the M20 and the A20. The east-west communications, particularly the A259 and the A2070, are inadequate. I draw the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends to the answer that I had from another Department of Transport Minister on 20 November showing that there will be no improvement to all major roads from the east to the west of Kent, and any plans are in suspension. The Brighton bypass, the Hastings bypass and the Eastbourne bypass are planned as far as the Kent border, and then nothing.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) can amply testify to the need for improvements in the road system from his experience of dealing with the problems in his constituency, just as I have to deal with such problems in my constituency. The improvement of the A28—the Hastings, Tenterden, Ashford, Canterbury route—is not the answer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) will know, unless we wish to smash many charming Wealden towns and villages.

Any link to get my support must have a substantial rail element. British Rail reckons that it can operate daily through the Channel tunnel or the Expressway route, 16 rail freight trains each way. That will be equivalent to transferring from road to rail some 365,000 heavy lorries a year. That is a tremendous prize, with a substantial environmental gain to be won. It is equivalent to about half the annual number of heavy lorries moving through the

[Mr. Keith Speed]

port of Dover now. I have heard very little about these positive points from the promoters, from British Rail, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, or anybody else.

If I have the figures wrong, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will correct me when he makes his winding-up speech. If I have not, these points should be underlined. The employment and development prospects for east Kent could be substantial, particularly in my constituency, if there were to be an international passenger station there. Government help for areas such as Dover—Ashford is the growth point for Kent in the strategy plan—would be an advantage.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe, as the House will understand, is unable to speak in this debate because he is a Minister in another Department. However, he has been assiduous on behalf of his constituents. He recognises that any decision will have to be taken in the national interest. We will have to ensure that full weight is given to the impact of the schemes on east Kent, and particularly on Folkestone and Hythe. Environmentally, my hon. and learned Friend believes that the Channel Tunnel Group proposal would inflict considerable damage to the amenities of the affected area, particularly the villages of Newington, Peene and Frogholt. He feels that the Euro-route scheme would have far-reaching consequences for Dungeness and its effect on the fishermen of Dungeness, who are the heirs to an ancient tradition, will be damaging. He believes that the Channel Expressway would do less immediate damage, but there are still many queries about this route. In other words, my hon. and learned Friend, who is my constituency next door neighbour, is saying that there are considerable problems with every one of the links.

My hon. and learned Friend has already negotiated a compensation arrangement with the Channel Tunnel Group to cover the most drastically affected area. If any scheme goes ahead, he will ensure that a careful watch is kept on it, and he will be working hard on the details. As a Minister, he can sometimes be much more effective than Back Benchers, so the rights and safeguards of his constituents can be properly looked after. Those of us who know my hon. and learned Friend and how active he has been so far on behalf of his constituents appreciate that he will discharge his responsibilities well. He is in close touch with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Rees).

We have talked about this project for a long time. As I said in an intervention to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), it is all very well talking about a public inquiry. That would take a long time, and for many individuals the problems of blight would be substantial. Nevertheless, I feel that this rush over the past few weeks and to come over the next few weeks, the substantial changes that have taken place in the schemes and the real fears expressed by the people of Kent show that there is a substantial responsibility on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, his Department and the Government generally. They must ensure that when and if a decision to go ahead is made, the fullest possible information, including information from the independent assessors, is provided for the whole country, so that an informed and meaningful debate can take place.

I shall be supporting the Government tonight, but they must not take my further votes for granted, because I shall

want to know what the assessors say and what the scheme is. For example, from what I have said it is unlikely that I could support a bridge scheme. We shall have to take both a national and a local view. We must reach a decision. If it is negative, let us forget about it until we are dead and gone, and, if it is positive, let us go ahead and make a success of it.

6.37 pm

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) has given us two speeches for the price of one—he also told us what the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) felt. However, he did not tell us which way the hon. and learned Member would be voting—I suppose that it will be with the Government, at least for tonight.

I agree with the hon. Member for Ashford to this extent. It is highly unsatisfactory that the promoters have been making significant changes in their schemes after the closing date of 31 October and while the Select Committee was taking evidence from them. It is relevant to mention that point in connection with the criticism that has been expressed from both sides of the House about the Government's timetable and the way that they are rushing to take a decision in January. They argue that as we have been thinking about the Channel tunnel for 100 years, we must make up our minds. The retort to that is that, if we have been thinking about it for 100 years, a few months will not make any difference, and if that is so it is extraordinary that, in the past few weeks, the promoters have been making significant changes to their proposals.

I am not persuaded by any of these schemes and will not vote for any of them, whether or not we have a public inquiry. We should have a public inquiry. The arguments from the Secretary of State against one are extraordinary and bite into the whole concept of a public inquiry for planning purposes. He said that developers would not like a public inquiry because it would cause a delay. Speaking as a former planning Minister, I can say that that argument is used by every developer about every public inquiry. They say that if we have a public inquiry it will cause delay and the development will go away.

It was disingenuous of the Secretary of State to suggest that the Government have not made up their mind. Obviously, they have decided that there will be one scheme, even if they have not decided which it will be. The whole tenor of his speech was that there will be a scheme of one sort or another. If this is such an exciting concept, a little delay should not discourage the promoters. Equally, a public inquiry would allow us fully to expose and deal with the many worries felt not only by Labour Members but also by Conservative Members. I do not believe that the hybrid Bill procedure will be a satisfactory alternative to a full public inquiry.

I agreed with virtually everything said by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price). He declared himself a Channel tunnel agnostic, and that makes me an atheist. He asked whether we needed a Channel tunnel and whether the existing services were inadequate and unable to cope with developments in the next 20 to 30 years. There can be only one answer—we do not need a fixed link. There is no suggestion that the existing services are unable to cope at present, nor is there any suggestion that they will be unable to cope in the foreseeable future.

That does not mean that under certain circumstances a Channel fixed link would not have certain marginal

advantages for some users. I do not dispute that, but there are many things on which we could spend money whose advantages would be far more than marginal. I could list many of them in my own constituency and for Scotland generally. We are not proceeding with such schemes at present, even though, like many of my hon. Friends, I believe that they have a greater priority than any marginal advantage that may arise from a Channel fixed link.

Some of the brochures give the impression that a private car will be able to be driven on to the fixed link within two minutes without customs or any other difficulties. That seems too good to be true and will be far removed from reality if a fixed link is actually built.

Mr. Adley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Millan: I know the hon. Gentleman's views. He is in favour of railways, here, there and everywhere, and I have much sympathy with him.

Although I am not in favour of any of the schemes, if I had to choose I would say that the Channel Tunnel Group scheme would have the fewest disadvantages.

Mr. David Marshall: Does not my right hon. Friend agree that there will have to be tight and strict controls to eliminate the possibility of rats or other animals using the fixed link to bring rabies and other endemic continental diseases into this country?

Mr. Millan: That is only one of the problems that spring to mind. There would also be considerable security problems.

It has been argued that, as private capital is involved, we need not worry because the market will take the risks. That is utterly absurd, but it is part of the absurdity of the Government's economic policy: it is fine if the Channel tunnel is built by private capital, whereas if it were built by public capital it would be a tremendous strain on the country's resources. In fact, the impact on the country's resources will be exactly the same whether the link is financed by public or private capital. If spending money on this kind of infrastructure project is good for the country, as the Government suggest, similar amounts of money spent on other infrastructure projects would be equally good and would be far better for the regions.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): As a former Cabinet Minister, my right hon. Friend will recall meeting deputations. I recall meeting a high-powered deputation of councillors from Essex and Kent who demanded the right to spend their own money to dual the Dartford tunnel. We did not allow that and told them, "It may be your own money, but it is coming from national resources." The same sort of arguments are obviously being put by the present Government because that tunnel has still not been dualled.

Mr. Millan: My hon. Friend has made an important point. The impact on resources is exactly the same whether it is private or public money. In any case, all this will not be decided by private enterprise, because the basic decision will be made by Government, and we trust that they will take account of the wider national interest. They should not take their decision solely on the basis of which project is economically the most desirable and attractive.

The Select Committee's 1981 report and its most recent report, together with the Anglo-French study group report, made it very clear that in that national interest a Channel fixed link must not destroy the existing ferry structure.

There are many sound national reasons for taking that view—for example, security and defence, and what happens if there is a breakdown in the fixed link and it has to be closed for major repairs. If that is an important consideration—I believe that it is vital—that in itself excludes some of the schemes that the Government are presently considering. On that consideration alone, the only scheme with merit, albeit marginal, is the Channel Tunnel Group project.

This also has important implications for pricing policy. In practice, it will not be possible to allow the ferries to determine one pricing policy and the fixed link another. If that happened, one or other could go out of business. Therefore, the Government will have to be involved in important matters of pricing policy, which in turn will affect economic viability. Private enterprise alone will simply be unable to determine these matters for itself, especially if we have a Government who are looking at the wider national interest.

What happens if the fixed link is half built, costs have overrun and the promoters want to stop building? It is politically absurd to think that the Government will say, "Stop. There is no more money to come." This British Government may be mad enough to abandon the project, but no French Government will allow that to happen. To my mind, it is financially and politically absurd to imagine that at the end of the day, there will be no public money guarantee.

Similarly, once the tunnel has been built, it is idle to believe that if it gets into financial trouble, the Government will simply stand aside and say, "You can just go bankrupt. It is of no importance to us. It is a normal commercial bankruptcy."

We are dealing with matters in which the Government are essentially involved and will continue to be involved. It obscures the issue to pretend that Government money is not involved one way or the other and that this is exclusively a matter for private enterprise.

I now turn to the wider environmental and economic considerations. Obviously, the impact of the fixed link will depend considerably on which project is chosen. I shall leave aside the jobs during the construction phase, not because they are unimportant, but because they will have short-term benefits. Some of the claims, such as those of Euroroute that all the work will be carried out in Scotland and the north of England, are absurd, and do not stand up to serious examination. It is not the immediate effect of the construction phase that is important, but the long-term effect on different areas.

The environmental effects will undoubtedly be bad in the south-east. There is no way in which any of the schemes can be tailored to prevent environmental damage in the south-east. If a scheme went ahead, there would immediately be a net loss of jobs and in the long term, a fixed link would act as a magnet, and attract further industrial development to the south-east, which is already the most over-crowded and economically prosperous part of the United Kingdom. The facts of geography are such that that will inevitably happen. Indeed, if that does not occur, it will mean that the fixed link has not been a success. The fixed link will either attract more business as a whole, or more of the business from cross-Channel crossings to the south-east. The real benefit in terms of economic and industrial development will ultimately go to the south-east.

[Mr. Millan]

That may be all right for the French because the Pas de Calais region is economically backward, but for us, it is entirely different. We need development, not in the south-east, but in other areas, which, contrariwise, will be adversely affected by the development. That will indeed be the case, if the scheme is geared to the railways. The idea that the north of England and Scotland would gain more benefit than the south, if we had a better railway system, is absurd. If the railway system is improved, all parts will gain, and Scotland will not gain more than other parts.

The Scottish Confederation of British Industry foolishly said that it had no view about the Channel fixed link provided that the A74 was improved. That is absurd. When my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleton (Mr. Marshall) asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the A74 would be improved if the fixed link went ahead, the Secretary of State said that he did not see the relevance of the question. That is what is wrong with him and the other members of the Government. They do not see the relevance of the project to Scotland, the north of England and other depressed regions, but we do. If the project goes ahead, it will widen the north-south divide, it will not be welcomed in Scotland or the north, and it will increase the economic disparities between the different parts.

The project is not needed. The Government are pushing it through on a timetable, which is outrageous. It will do a great deal of economic damage to the most vulnerable areas, and it is being introduced by a Government who have abandoned many of the tenets of regional policy which successive Governments have followed since the end of the war. That is why I shall not only vote against the motion tonight, but shall continue to do so, whatever the Government's decision is.

6.54 pm

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): Much as I respect the views of the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), as a spokesman for Scotland, I do not see why he should tell the House that an advantage to Britain which gives greater advantage to the south-east than to the north is wrong. He has every right to speak for Scotland's interest, but we are talking about an overall advantage which could arise for Britain, not whether it is more beneficial for one part than another. I hope that my speech will be short. I want only to talk about the south-east.

I am in a difficult position. It was illustrated this morning when I went to a BBC studio which was about 70 miles away from my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), who was in a BBC studio in London. We had a conversation together with a charming lady. She was in London, and I had not met her. She said, "Mr. Crouch, you must be in a difficult position. I understand that you are in favour of the tunnel, but your constituents are almost wholly opposed to it." That is, indeed, the case. That is my problem, and I have sought to explain to the House and the whole nation, particularly my constituents in Canterbury and east Kent, why I shall not follow their advice. About 80 per cent. of my constituents are wholly opposed to a fixed link.

I have sought advice from the greatest of all advisers—a parliamentarian who lived 200 hundred years ago called Edmund Burke. In 1774 he said

"parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole".

What good advice! I rest my position on it. Although I represent Canterbury and east Kent, I am concerned about the good of the whole, while we deliberate this question.

I recognise the two views about a Channel link—for and against. I wholly appreciate the strong arguments advanced by those who oppose the link, and I have listened to them with interest today. However, I have always believed that there is an advantage in having a fixed link. It is simply stated: as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, with 64 per cent. of our overseas trade with the continent of Europe, we must have a much better line of communication than we have by relying on an uncertain sea passage. I see no other arguments.

Has any hon. Member not experienced what it is like to travel to Dover? One ends up at Dover Priory, alights at that wretched station, boards a wretched bus for the western docks and boards a boat as a foot passenger. It is a thoroughly uncomfortable way of travelling. Moreover one must hump one's luggage. Even if one is unable to carry it all, one receives no help—there are never any porters—and one is never sure whether one is on the right platform or quayside. Only last week a friend of mine returning to the United Kingdom was delayed one hour and the ferry paraded up and down in front of Dover harbour entrance, unable to pass through because of the rough weather.

Only last September after a splendid trip to Geneva, and having stopped off for an extra lunch in Paris, I arrived at Boulogne on a beautiful summer's evening, expecting to get the hovercraft, only to be told that there had been a storm in the Channel and that the hovercraft was cancelled. I then had to take a slow train to Calais—it was rather a devious trip—to join a great, empty ferry boat. Again I had to hump my luggage, and many older people than me, believe it or not, had to do the same. I could not even help them because I was laden with luggage having been abroad. Has any hon. Member ever tried to climb the stairways on those ships to reach the top deck where the bars are? They are extremely steep, and it is hard to do so.

We thought that the French ferry boat would be empty and that we would have a pleasant, quiet voyage on what was now a calm sea. Then 40 motor coaches arrived from a Belgian beer festival, loaded with my fellow countrymen who had been enjoying the festival for two days, so it was not such a calm and comfortable journey back to Dover Priory. At Dover Priory one faced the awful difficulty of finding a bus, with the added possibility of missing one's train. Clearly, I like the fixed link and I do not need to go further.

On a serious note, there is a price that has to be paid in this country, and in east Kent in particular. East Kent is used to that experience. We had to pay a price in the last war. Dover and Folkestone were in the front line. They were shelled every day from the other side of the Channel, and in return we were shelling the French coast. The area was then known as Hell Fire Corner. We did not complain in east Kent. We took it on the chin. People in the rest of the country praised us. There was a price to pay: we suffered casualties, as the whole nation knows.

Today, in peace-time, we shall also suffer some casualties from a major industrial and economic project,

the Channel fixed link. There will be a loss of jobs in Folkestone and Dover and probably in some other ports around the coast. There will also be backwater areas left in Kent. They will be bypassed by the magnet of the fixed link and the roads that lead to it. I am thinking of the constituency of Thanet, North, and possibly Deal and the area going right round through Herne Bay to Whitstable on the north Kent coast. That last town is in my constituency. Those places are already backwaters and are not part of the industrial achievement, progress and riches that epitomise much of the south-east of England, because unemployment in those areas is touching 22 per cent. today.

With the magnet of the fixed link, and the main motorways that will lead to it, I can visualise those areas becoming sad backwaters, with people not even bothering to go to them, as they drive to London at about 70 mph. Therefore, attention must be paid to planning. It is not the task of my right hon. Friend. The Department of the Environment and the Department of Trade and Industry will have to be concerned with the planning aspects of the fixed link. Indeed, the whole Government will have to be involved in ensuring that the problem arising from loss of jobs in east Kent, in the backwater areas, is alleviated by good planning and good communications. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) has already made that point. Another problem which is already on the horizon in Kent is the possible decline of the coalfields.

Kent will pay a high price for what is coming, but we know that we shall also have some gains. New jobs will be created within the next 25 years if the fixed link goes ahead. In the construction period, thousands of jobs will be created across the country, perhaps 50,000, but not all in Kent. Much of the fabrication will be done in the north-east and north-west of England, and in Scotland, in the major industrial constructing areas, but, or course, there will be great activity in and around the bridge or tunnel entrance and on the roads that lead to it.

The Secretary of State mentioned what the road development would be, but I ask him not to underestimate the effect of the magnet of the tunnel when planning the size of the motorway. Last week a friend of mine was held up on the M25 near Reigate for two hours, missing every engagement. That was because of one lorry jack-knifing on a three-lane motorway and causing a tailback which took two hours to clear. I hope that my right hon. Friend and his experts will study the problem very seriously and plan for the future. The M20 that feeds the tunnel entrance should be at least a four-lane motorway of the sort that is found in the United States.

Mr. Dalyell rose—

Mr. Crouch: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way, as many other hon. Members wish to speak.

A big motorway will be a better safeguard for Kent than a small one. A small motorway will drive people on to the side roads to find other ways to the tunnel. A big motorway will enable the traffic to be properly contained. I want to see proper planning and controls to ensure that the development to which the project will give rise will not run riot or run roughshod over Kent.

I am particularly thinking of the industrial and commercial development that will of necessity, in the next 25 years, grow up around the road to the tunnel portal. I

can remember what happened on the Great West road in the 1930s. It is the most interesting example of rather haphazard modern industrial growth. We do not want haphazard planning now. We do not want the haphazard approach of saying that it will create a great number of jobs or of saying, "Come down to Kent", to the dismay of hon. Members in the rest of the country. We must create only the right amount of industrial development. A great sprawl of industrial development on the road to the tunnel would wipe out the Garden of England. That would be a tragedy. It would mean losing part of our precious heritage. It is not necessary for that to happen. We want some industrial development, but let it be properly controlled and constrained.

A nation such as ours, which can produce industrial growth, with modern communications such as we are contemplating, should also be planning to avoid any destruction of our heritage and our countryside. In Kent, we do not want to lose the Garden of England, neither would the rest of Britain like to see that despoilation of the countryside. I believe that the whole House—not just the Kent Members—will want us to embark on this great project in a 21st century and not a 19th century manner.

7.7 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Nothing symbolises the debate better than the contributions of my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) and the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch). Their speeches illustrate the great gulf that has been emerging between the two Britains over the past decade or so.

The hon. Gentleman rightly talked of the need to preserve the garden of England and everything that is fine about Kent. Those from our end of the nation would support him in that endeavour, but for the north of England and Scotland the test tonight is whether the House believes in the concept of one nation, and whether it believes that it will be making a decision in the interests of that one nation or in the interests of one narrow region that is already the richest part of the country. My constituents want to know whether they are considered to be relevant to the decision-making of the Government.

The Prime Minister has already said that she had the political will to carry through the fixed link. Obviously, she has made up her mind that it will go through, but no great arguments have been put forward by the Government in support of the project. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin) in his comments about the quality of the report of the Select Committee on Transport. Nevertheless, the question which hung persistently over the Committee's recent inquiry was whether there is any need for a fixed link. The Committee has not received any very satisfactory answer. It is scandalous that, prior to what should be an important debate, we have no answers to that fundamental question.

Many areas to the north of the south-east of England are being despoiled by the recession and have a genuine fear about the future. Inevitably, they feel that the decision to invest billions of pounds in one region, the south-east, is to their detriment. Let us make it clear that the resources that go into the fixed link are the resources of the nation. They are part of the finite resources that will not be invested in Scotland, the north of England, Wales or any other part of the United Kingdom. Since 1977 the north of England has seen the loss of nearly 750,000 jobs, which

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

represents nearly two thirds of job losses in Britain, so we are inevitably concerned, not about whether the project will be of benefit to that one region, but about whether it continues the now almost automatic tendency of the economy to marginalise the north of England. We are not prepared to accept that marginalisation in the north. My right hon. Friend the Member for Govan was right that the pull and the attraction of the south-east of England and the north of France is stronger than that which we in the north of England or Scotland can exercise.

Mr. Churchill: Does the hon. Gentleman not have the vision to see that when industrialists in Trafford Park, which rests in both of our constituencies just outside Manchester, can put their products on freightliner trains leaving at 8 o'clock in the evening and arriving with their products in the heart of Europe in Frankfurt or Milan, 24 or 36 hours later, we shall be able to compete on a level footing in our principal markets?

Mr. Lloyd: I do see that, and I would welcome it if it were one-way traffic, but it is not. I can also see the day when the distance between the north of France and London becomes less than the distance between Manchester and London. I can see the day when the decision taken in the City of London, where unfortunately most of the decisions that affect Trafford Park take place—whether it be Lord Weinstock in Stanhope Gate or the decision-makers from any other company in Trafford Park—will not be about whether to locate in Trafford Park but about whether to locate in France. It will be easier to serve the dominant region of Britain from continental Europe than from parts of the United Kingdom.

Whether hon. Members want to accept it not, the problem of the north-west of England is not one of trying to attract mobile investment because that has all ceased to exist under the present Government. The real problem is to hang on to the companies that we have. I quote from Les Boardman, the managing director of the Greater Manchester Economic Development Council, who said in a recent *Financial Times* article concerning Greater Manchester that:

"unemployment could be 'reduced appreciably' if more was done to encourage established companies to expand locally rather than further afield."

The decision to build a fixed link will make that not easier, but more difficult. In the same article the *Financial Times* journalist talked of the infrastructure needs of Greater Manchester and the advantages that the area has. He said:

"These positive advantages, however, cannot conceal infrastructure deficiencies."

He went on to say:

"As with so many of the county's problems, more cash would make their impact much less severe."

The reality is that if we are investing in infrastructure in the fixed Channel link, we will not be investing in the infrastructure in the north-west of England or other parts of the United Kingdom.

It is ironic that the south-east has almost the converse of those problems. Conservative Members have already made that point. There is unemployment but there is also the matter of the M25, which has been described as a virtual traffic jam. House prices in the area are already twice what they are in the north of England. It is expected that over the next 30 years around 1 million more people will move into that region. The condition of life for many

people in the south-east is beginning to be considered unacceptable. However, the fixed Channel link will exacerbate all those tendencies and the regional differences between the north and the south.

We are entitled to say to the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) that we do not believe their well-meaning comments that everything will be all right for the north of England and Scotland. That does not figure in the experience that we have of the way in which the economy has worked and it does not account for the way in which the economy is currently working. It is extremely unlikely, with a Government who have no regional policy and do not attempt to implement any form of regional thinking, that the recovery will begin to work in that way.

I share the atheistic views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Govan about the Channel tunnel. In all circumstances it is extremely bad news for many parts of Britain. I shall do what I can to see that any fixed link is frustrated because it does not serve the needs of the area that I represent. The ultimate test is that it does not serve the need to keep the nation together. It would be foolish for any hon. Member to believe that the north of England or anywhere else in the country will put its head willingly into the noose. The worst feature of colonialism in days gone by was that it allowed no obligation to those who lived in the colonies. Unfortunately, the Government increasingly treat the north of England as their colony. They do not consult the area, have no obligation to it and take it for granted. They do not believe that the north has any role in the future of the country.

We do not see industry coming to the north under the Government because we do not have the regional policy that we need. The minimum that we want is reassurance on the fixed Channel link. What are the precise job implications for the north of England and Scotland? Unless the Secretary of State is prepared to tell us, we do not accept that the link is good for the nation because we are not considered to be part of the nation. What hidden costs are there? What are the £350 million that was quoted as being needed by British Rail? What are the £30 million that Kent county council says that it will need if a fixed Channel link goes ahead?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose*—

Mr. Lloyd: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but I have nearly finished.

Will those hidden costs be paid for by the taxpayers throughout Britain as a hidden subsidy, as already happens in other areas? The north of England will not accept its colonial role.

The Channel tunnel is a matter of great concern. It is fundamental to the way in which the nation is governed. In the north of England, or so-called peripheral region, we do not believe that the Government are the Government of one nation. They are a divisive Government of one region. The fixed tunnel link is one part of the process of separating the nation down the divide between the south-east and the rest.

7.18 pm

Sir John Wells (Maidstone): I wish to remind the House that the volume of traffic that is already going to the narrow Dover ports—what my hon. Friend the

Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) described as the corset of Dover—is vast. Our real problem in Kent is to make life tolerable for the people who live there with the influx of modern traffic. It is my belief that if we have a good fixed link we will have better infrastructure, which will be paid for substantially from the proceeds of the hybrid Bill, not by the ratepayers of Kent. It will benefit us in many ways.

I think that the fears that have been expressed about the lack of a public inquiry are ill-founded. There can be no doubt in my mind that two Select Committees under the hybrid Bill procedure, one in the House and one in the other place, are the highest possible form of public inquiry.

I apologise for seeming cavalier in what I am about to say to hon. Members who have served on the present Select Committee on Transport, but I believe that what one might loosely call the Crossman Select Committees do a shallow, inadequate, publicity-seeking and generally pretty useless job.

Mr. Ron Lewis (Carlisle): Not all.

Sir John Wells: Not all, but in general.

The problem is that the British public have seen some of the publicity-seeking shallowness of the Crossman Select Committees, and they do not appreciate the proper in-depth work that can be done by an old-fashioned hybrid Bill Select Committee appointed for that purpose, with the good will of the Government and, perhaps more important, the Court of Referees, who are, after all, the people who decide what will be competent to be considered.

If we are to have that great procedure, it should set people's minds at rest, but I believe that it is up to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to sell that idea in Kent. It is up to my right hon. Friend also to sell the idea in Kent that the infrastructure will be improved at Treasury expense.

I do not want to bore on too much about our county. Various hon. Members have spoken with a tear jerk about the garden of England. Let us face it—the garden of England will be destroyed by the incompetence of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food far more than by the competence or incompetence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. He can only do us good.

The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) was at pains to point out that all the projects will be bad for his part of the country, and that there will be a magnet for jobs. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) said—and I suspect that in a few minutes my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) will say—that they will be bad for jobs in their part of the country. They all talk about the magnet. Which area will get these wonderful jobs that are to be created? The magnet that we hear about so much displeases Govan and seems to displease Canterbury and Thanet. Let us be realistic. If there are to be real new jobs and advantages for the unemployed, the lines of force—if I remember my physics right—are what we need to look at. We need to see the flow of electricity and consider where it wishes to go.

The problem that we shall be up against is in niggardly planning regulations and small-minded planning attitudes. Therefore, my right hon. Friend has not only the duties of educating and helping with the infrastructure but of

continuing to liaise, as he has already begun to do very well, with Kent county council to make sure that planning is firm so that we do not deprive Govan or Stretford of their jobs, and that suitable jobs in limited situations are fairly near the portals, but not so that they make the immediate environs of the tunnel unacceptable.

Great play has been made about the 6.5 million cu m of spoil that will be generated. How much depends on which project is accepted. For many years I knew intimately one of the great gardens of England situated near the portal of the old Great Western Railway from Somerset to Devon. That garden was constructed in and around the spoil that had come out of the Whiteball tunnel. It is only 1 mile long, and is only a single bore. If we are to have four-bore tunnels 22 miles long, there will be 100 times more spoil. If the spoil from 1 mile created a great garden—no more than that, but not a suburban back patch—the spoil from 6.5 million cu m can be seen in a better perspective. It can be considered as potential landscaping for only 100 great gardens. That may satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury, who wishes to assist the garden of England, but I had to make that point to get the spoil into perspective.

Similarly, the environmentalists who are so passionate about what will or will not be lost must try to get their anxieties into perspective. My right hon. Friend has a fourth duty—to meet and talk to the environmentalists and get experts from his Department to be more sympathetic to them. The environmentalists are genuinely anxious. They express themselves pretty badly, very vociferously and fairly unpleasantly, but a man of my right hon. Friend's charm and sweet nature should woo them to a bit of reasonableness.

7.23 pm

Mr. Ron Lewis (Carlisle): I do not want to enter into an argument with the hon. Member for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells) on Select Committees, but he was a little off beam when he labelled most of the Select Committees as inappropriate and a complete waste of time. That was a little too much. Nevertheless, he made his profit, and I appreciate that.

The only person who so far in the debate has come down on one side is the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch). To be fair to him, in his introduction he explained his position as a Kent Member. I appreciate the problems that Kent Members have with their constituents and the project, but he is the only one who has come down in favour of one of the schemes. I want to be the second to do so.

First, I should declare my interest. Right up to the moment when I came to the House, I was employed by British Rail. For many years, right up to the present day, that has entailed my being a fully paid-up member of the National Union of Railwaymen. Over the years, the NUR has always supported a Channel tunnel link between here and the French coast. We favour the Channel tunnel route. Despite what has been said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), the union, having considered the matter over the years, feels that a link such as the one that is envisaged will be beneficial not only to railwaymen in all parts of the country but to the country as a whole. We argue the Channel Tunnel Group's case.

[Mr. Ron Lewis]

The railway unions, which have met their counterparts in France, believe that there is a case for a fixed link. It will be beneficial for Britain's economy and its construction will stimulate employment and industry. A fixed link will ensure that Britain obtains maximum benefit from the already growing trade with the rest of Europe. It will enable the increasing tourist trade to be handled with more speed and convenience than it is at present. Such a link will be unaffected by adverse weather conditions.

Dr. Godman: The local economy in my constituency would be stimulated only if the Euroroute were introduced, because Scott Lithgow would play an active part in the construction. Otherwise—and I declare an interest—there would be little or nothing to stimulate the Scottish economy.

Mr. Lewis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The Channel Tunnel Group estimates that for the north of England and Scotland the link will mean 6,470 jobs; for the east and the west Midlands 16,250 jobs; for Kent 1,750 jobs; and elsewhere 530 jobs. It will be beneficial for steel in my hon. Friend's constituency because of the boost to the economy. The NUR believes that such a link will help to stimulate the economy.

The link will benefit the railways. A rail link will reduce journey times to continental destinations for passenger and freight traffic and will enable more frequent services to be made available. Whether we like it or not, a vast proportion of British people would never attempt to board an aeroplane because they have a dread of flying. Many people dislike crossing the sea, especially the Channel, because of currents and other hazards. If we had a rail link, people from Manchester or Scotland could board a train and go direct to the continent without the hullabaloo that they experience now. Those people would benefit considerably from the rail link.

British Rail will begin with 16 freight trains a day in each direction compared with the present three or four freight connections with ferry services. That alone would benefit industry. The hon. Member for Canterbury, who has just left the Chamber, said that container traffic could be put on a wagon, for example, in Scotland and travel direct to its destination. Over a long distance, such as 250 miles, it is much cheaper to use the railway network than the road network.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm something that has always intrigued me—that the British Rail loading gauge is smaller than the continental one? British rolling stock will be able to amble over the entire European railway system, but European rolling stock will be restricted to Britain. Therefore, there are greater opportunities for our manufacturers of rolling stock.

Mr. Lewis: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that will be beneficial for us, but that is a matter for the Europeans.

Assuming that the link goes ahead, it will benefit the railways which have been run down. It is estimated that from the first year of operation, which some people believe could be in 1993, container traffic will increase by about 7 million tonnes by the year 2003.

The NUR supports the construction of the tunnel because it believes that it will be beneficial to the country as a whole. We can only hope that the Prime Minister, who will be meeting the President of France, will not show the hostility towards the railways that she has shown in the past.

7.36 pm

Sir John Osborn (Sheffield, Hallam): To debate the Channel fixed link implies arguing not only the case for a fixed link but considering the merits and demerits of each proposed scheme.

I declare three specific interests. During the past 18 months I have been chairman of the all-party Channel Tunnel Group, a task previously carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells). I joined the group in 1960, 25 years ago, following presentation of a scheme by Leo d'Erlanger similar to that which was pursued in 1974 and similar to that put forward by the Channel Tunnel Group, a concept which was so ably defended by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis).

The all-party Channel Tunnel Group has decided to keep its name. We support the fixed link, but assert that it must have provision for rail as well as for heavy goods vehicles and passenger cars. I believe that the need for such a fixed link is greater today than it was in 1974. However, the British people are more indifferent to that greater need than they were 12 years ago.

My second declared interest is that I am an active member of the Council of Europe committee dealing with transport, and 10 years ago I was a member of the committee in the European Parliament which dealt with similar issues. I have spoken to Commissioners of the EC and I have become aware of the views of the European Council of Transport Ministers, which has tried to accelerate, through co-ordination, the removal of barriers to trade caused by poor transport links. Examples of such barriers are the chasm across the Baltic to the north, between Sweden and Denmark and the Alps to the south, which have been opened up by the Brenner pass and the Mont Blanc and Gothard tunnels. Since Britain joined the EC 13 years ago there has been a dynamic expansion of trade. Sixty per cent. of our exports go to the EC. However, the inadequate access caused by the 20-mile water barrier puts this country at a disadvantage.

Thirdly, as a northern Member of Parliament, I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd). I am worried about jobs and about the prosperity of Britain as a whole, and I support the bold view of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch). As a northern industrialist involved with special steels and engineering, I was aware of the need for customers to have ready access to suppliers, in my case in Sheffield. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware of my failed campaign to develop an airport for Sheffield. I also believe that the cities of the north could gain a distinct advantage from railway freight links, perhaps using containers, travelling regularly and speedily from the midlands to Milan, Madrid and elsewhere. I hope that British Rail is alive to that challenge and opportunity. I am certain that rail has a distinct advantage over lorries. The hon. Member for Carlisle mentioned the advantage up to 250 miles, but I believe that it has a great advantage over the freight lorry over distances of 500 to 1,000 miles.

Although I should have liked a gas pipeline to have been built alongside the Channel tunnel, I welcome the

fact that there will be an electricity link. However, time prevents me from describing its ready advantages. I see huge benefits to the nation from a fixed link across the Channel.

It should be remembered that aviation fuel and even petrol for cars will be more expensive, if not scarcer, in the early part of the next century. Therefore, the use of electric trains will have increasing advantages over the use of other forms of transport.

For business, but above all for tourism and pleasure, passenger trains and long-distance buses will compete with air travel up to distances of 600 to 1,000 miles—certainly an average of 800 miles. A fixed link could capture much of the market and enable British Rail to compete with air on speed, if not on price, and enable long-distance bus companies to compete on price using the fixed link as has been found on motorway routes in Britain and Europe.

A fixed link would make Britain part of a changing and accelerating pattern in the EC and western Europe. The barrier of the sea denies us an advantage that other EC countries have.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would comment on the fact that the European Council of Transport Ministers is discussing with the French an extension of the TGV—the train à grande vitesse—to Brussels. It already covers the 400 kilometres between Paris and Lyons in less than two hours, and the service could be extended to other European capitals. Train journeys between London and Paris and London and Brussels would be greatly improved if they took only four hours, let alone the forecast three and a quarter hours, with appropriate improvements to the tracks. However, at this time of year, as a delegate to the Council of Europe, I would welcome an evening train that would get me to Paris as quickly as I can get from Strasbourg to Paris. The present system puts British representatives of commerce, trade and Parliament at a disadvantage.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) argued for a full inquiry. But there was a full investigation in 1930. I was actively involved in the proposals put forward in the 1970s by Lord Peyton who then represented Yeovil and was Secretary of State for Transport. In the early 1970s, I attended a debate at the Institute of Civil Engineers addressed by General Sverdrop on the merits of a tunnel against those of a bridge. During a visit to Transpo '72 in Washington, he arranged for me to drive across the 22 miles of Chesapeake bay, which took me 17 minutes. He said to me, "When are you Europeans going to do the same? I forecast 1985, but how wrong I was."

I have listened to the anxieties expressed by hon. Members on behalf of the citizens of Kent, but I ask, as the Americans did, "Why are we dithering over this matter, which has been on the agenda for more than 150 years?" The problem of Dover, Calais and the other ports was a hot issue 15 years ago, but whatever the solution then, I am convinced that we must arrange for Yarmouth, Hull, Felixstowe, Margate, Portsmouth, Southampton and Plymouth to obtain just under half of any traffic. The major feature of competition is flexibility, and the purpose of monopolies legislation is to ensure that a monopoly does not eliminate competition. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider the matter.

I have had meetings in France with the equivalent of the Channel Tunnel Group. We must gain its confidence that Britain means business this time. The fact that Britain

reneged in 1975 caused distrust that the Government and Members of Parliament must try to overcome. The courtesy of the French to us at that time must not be forgotten.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked whether the hot favourite in the Sunday press—the Expressway—is worth considering. I have driven through the Gothard pass, which is about 17-km long. As a member of the House of Commons Motor Club and the Institute of Advanced Motorists, I would have no trouble driving through a 50-km tunnel, but not everyone would find it so convenient. Therefore, my right hon. Friend must discuss with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the police, the Institute of Advanced Motoring and perhaps the Freight Transport Association whether a 50-km tunnel is feasible. Similarly, the spiral of the Euroroute project would be a hazard to tired heavy vehicle drivers plying between Paris and London.

I support a fixed road-rail link. With the hon. Member for Carlisle, I hope that the Channel Tunnel Group will succeed, although that goes against the assessment of the Sunday newspapers—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps some advance notice was given. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) cavilled at the promoters' moving the goal posts. The Channel tunnel Group has not done that. It has the same posts as it had 25 years ago. I look forward to the outcome of the assessment. However, it is important that it should be an Anglo-French assessment, bearing in mind some of the problems that will be caused to those who live in Calais as against the advantages to those who live in the north of France generally.

7.48 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Hon. Members laughed at the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) when he said in effect that he was worried about the Sunday newspapers. However, the Secretary of State must tell us what we are discussing today. Are we being asked to debate and to give an opinion on the need for a fixed link, or are we going through an elaborate dance of death because the decisions have already been taken? I ask the Secretary of State that because I believe that there is no greater cynicism or insult to Members of Parliament than to say suddenly, "Of course you may have a debate on such a major matter as a fixed link between Britain and the continent," but to imply that that will be done within a foreshortened timetable, because the important decisions have already been made in 10 Downing street.

I am happy to join my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis), who is a most respected member of the Select Committee on Transport, in discussing the various types of fixed link and the advantageous which we both feel strongly, favour a rail tunnel. I am not prepared to go through a totally empty exercise if the Prime Minister is not concerned about the transport, economic or political implications of the fixed link and the Secretary of State is not prepared to talk about planning implications, job losses or investment.

The Government have decided to make a vast gesture, to be timed for a general election, so that they can say to the electorate, "Look what we have done. We have instigated a great white elephant to prove that we have at least done something during the time of our parliamentary control." That is a real and agitating problem. What possible objection can there be to a public inquiry if this

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

scheme is so important? We have been told that there was a full inquiry before, but that was years ago. The Government have said that consultation has taken place, but that was only in the county of Kent and it has not actually assuaged the fears of the people in that area. There has been no consultation with the regions. Hon. Members who represent areas outside the south-east are very concerned about the implications of whatever link is to be foisted on us by the Secretary of State.

In the area affected, which is represented mainly by Conservative Members of Parliament, the *Folkestone, Hythe and District Herald* was so anxious about the lack of consultation that it devised a questionnaire. A junior Minister from the Department of Transport has visited the area and his visits are not only welcome but informative—I can hardly imagine anything more devoutly to be wished than a visit from a junior Minister at the Department of Transport—but one or two niggling doubts remained, so the *Folkestone, Hythe and District Herald* produced its questionnaire three weeks ago. Readers were asked to fill in and return the questionnaires to the editorial offices. The editor intends to make the results public at the end of the week, but he has been kind enough to allow me to use them today as they are extremely interesting.

A total of 2,335 questionnaires were returned and more are coming in with every post. One of the main questions was: "Are you in favour of a fixed link?" The figure in favour was 5.6 per cent. and those against 94 per cent. Another question asked whether readers would be in favour of some sort of public inquiry, which is the question that the House is discussing today. There were 86 per cent. in favour of a public inquiry and 14 per cent. against.

The questionnaire also asked what effect the fixed link would have on the environment. Of those who replied, 90 per cent. said that it would worsen the environment, 2.2 per cent. said that it would improve it and 7.8 per cent. said that it would make no difference.

The questionnaire also asked what effects the fixed link would have on the local towns. In Dover, 2 per cent. said that it would have a good effect and 98 per cent. said that it would have a bad effect. In Folkestone 4 per cent. said that it would have a good effect and 96 per cent. a bad one. As for whether there had been enough information about the fixed link proposals, the answer was yes from 18 per cent. of respondents and no from 75 per cent. of the respondents; the "don't knows" were 7 per cent.

I am very worried about the results of that questionnaire. The Select Committee has been castigated today for the speed of its response. It should be borne in mind that not only was the Committee told that it would have a short time to make its considerations, but the House does not have the benefit of the evidence which the Committee examined in relation to the various schemes. There may be something to be said for the different schemes and for evaluating the economic impacts of a fixed link as a whole, but the House does not have access to proper independent assessments.

If the Secretary of State is so confident of the outcome, why has he had to set such a tight timetable? Why does he now intend to allow the Prime Minister to sign what in effect will be a treaty with a foreign Government, before the House has had time to evaluate any responses? The Secretary of State said today that the White Paper will be

published after the evaluation has been made not by the House but by the Department of Transport. The House must consider that information before decisions are taken and the House needs access to the information to know exactly what we are committing ourselves to.

The sad, hard lesson that I have learnt from the Secretary of State is that he has one undying and reliable trait—when the rest of the House are discussing transport, he is talking about money. He did that in the Transport Act 1985, he did it in relation to other basic and important services and he is doing it now in connection with the fixed link.

The fixed link cannot conceivably go ahead without any cost to the state or to other basic services that must be connected to the link. If there is to be an efficient rail service, it is inconceivable not to talk about the amounts of money required for British Rail to link in and provide the infrastructure and necessary services. It is also inconceivable that a major change of this nature could be made without examining the implications for the south-east and all the coastal regions that would be affected.

It is not beyond the wit of man or even woman to work out that, if there is an effective motorway system running from Scandinavia through northern Germany, down through the Benelux countries as far as the shortest Channel crossing, that will distort traffic movement and, particularly if it is a road pattern used only with road links, undermine other forms of transport, including many of our ports.

Mr. David Marshall: My hon. Friend asks the reason for the undue haste and she has mentioned the finances that would be involved. One of the reasons for the undue haste is to encourage and speed up the profits that the winner of the contract can make. Paragraph 61 of the Select Committee report states:

"When, however, it was suggested to Sir Nigel Brookes that if the EuroRoute scheme were built, the Channel would remain the most expensive stretch of water in the world to cross, he replied 'I do not disagree with you. I hope you are right!'" That is the real reason for the speed—to make vast profits for whatever scheme gets the go-ahead.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Whatever the reasons—I do not disagree with the assessments of the Select Committee or of my hon. Friend—the House ought to have better information available so that hon. Members can make up their own minds on the issue.

The whole system of EEC tendering will make it impossible, even if the promoters were prepared to give undertakings, for a specific percentage of employment arising from the construction of the fixed link to be retained in this country. The history of EEC contracts has shown that the British have played according to the rules and that almost every other EEC country has gained a higher proportion of the contracts involved. We may talk about generating more employment in the south of Spain or in certain Portuguese mills, but we are not talking about generating employment in the United Kingdom. It is important to be honest and straightforward about that.

I have an objection that is stronger and more important than that. There may be a case for a fixed link, which may be a rail tunnel. It would be remarkable if the House of Commons announced that it approved of a system that arbitrarily rides over the interests of all the people involved, refusing public inquiries, refusing consultation, replacing a correct assessment of the basic needs of the

people of this island with an arbitrary public relations effort in which glossy pamphlets are preferred to correct economic assessment. If that is the situation, the Secretary of State is carrying out a cynical, unacceptable, anti-democratic exercise, and his contempt for the House of Commons will be noted by people outside.

7.59 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I share, although not in the same language, some of the reservations expressed by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) about the decision-making process at the heart of government in relation to the Channel fixed link. Nevertheless, I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his restraint, which was apparent not only in his low key speech but in his decision to come to the Dispatch Box without a Santa Claus costume. He began by asking the House to enter with him into a world of pure Yuletide fantasy when he suggested that the Government had not yet made up their mind whether they wanted a fixed link, and he ended by giving us a tantalising glimpse of the pork barrel bran tub of glittering prizes on offer for those who win the competition.

Even the most dedicated opponent of the link would be foolish not to admit that there are glittering short-term prizes for the winners. There will be a short-term boom in contracts for construction companies and temporary jobs for workers, although it is not clear how many of them will be on this side of the Channel. In the short term, there will be some luscious front-end fees and financial rewards for the promoters and their friends in the City. In the short term, too, the project may even create enough political excitement to deliver some election-winning votes on both sides of the Channel—and all from a decision reached in fewer than 100 days.

At the risk of sounding like a Cassandra at the Christmas party, I wish to express some sombre warnings about the long-term implications of the fixed link and, above all, to urge the Government to slow down their headlong rush to pick a winner by mid-January through their present secretive and unsatisfactory procedures.

I begin on a historical note. We British are an island people living in an island kingdom. Our heritage, our culture, our history, our way of life and our traditions are what they are, partly, perhaps largely, because we have always been geographically separated from continental Europe by the English Channel. If we believe that our distinctive island sense of nationhood is still important, we should be under no illusion that today we are merely debating a large construction contract mainly for the benefit of cross-Channel travellers—far from it.

The fixed link is not only the biggest civil engineering project that this country has ever seen, but it is capable of being a massive social engineering project with enormous and unforeseen consequences for our future destiny and way of life. I believe, for example, that the decision that the Government intend to take behind closed doors next month could have as much impact on the lives of our children and grandchildren as the decision taken behind closed doors 20 years ago by another Government to permit widespread Commonwealth immigration. Even if that prediction is not correct, one does not need to be clairvoyant to see that free and unrestricted movement of goods, services and people on the scale envisaged by the

promoters is likely to have incalculable consequences for the economy, security, health and status quo of these islands.

An early warning of the ability of a fixed link to change established patterns and procedures in this country is clear from the effect so far on the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport. Those two Departments are or should be the embodiment of our national planning procedures and their inspectors the respected arbiters of fair play. The two Secretaries of State should be the keepers of the ark of the covenant which lays down an agreed law on all public inquiries and consultative procedures leading up to major planning decisions which are so important in a small country. Since the fixed link was announced, the accusations about goal posts being moved halfway through the match have applied to the Secretary of State for Transport. Instead of a public inquiry, even in the shortened and unconventional form which I believe Anthony Crosland envisaged, we are to have 100 days of secret political decision-making by a Minister and his civil servants followed by an equally unsatisfactory hybrid Bill procedure. It is an Alice-in-Wonderland world, reminiscent especially of the passage in which the Queen of Hearts calls for "Sentence first—verdict afterwards."

There are only two reasons for the overthrow of all established rules on planning inquiries. My hon. Friend the Minister of State gave one at Ashford on 28 November, when he said:

"A public inquiry would mean a delay of about 3 years. There is no way in the world that the investment institutions will keep their money standing for that long. If there was to be that delay the whole project would be dead." That is a somewhat naive view. Like many hon. Members, I worked in the City long enough to know that if the figures are enticing enough, this year, next year, some time, whenever, the punters will still be willing.

The second reason for throwing all the procedures overboard is pressure from the French. President Mitterrand is an old man in a hurry. He faces difficult elections next year and he wants to remain at the Elysée palace rather than to retire to Angoulême les Deux Eglises. There is pressure on the British to fall into the quicker and more centralised French decision-making procedures to produce a quick result in time for a glamorous announcement at the summit meeting at the end of January. Bowing to French pressure is no good reason for the secretive rush job on which the Department of Transport has embarked. In fewer than 40 working days, teams of civil servants and their Ministers have to try to evaluate more than 20,000 pages of rival bids following a feeble and half-hearted consultation exercise. It is a recipe for a half-baked result in which the more profound technical, financial, environmental and social problems will be inadequately investigated, glossed over in haste and served up to the public as a fait accompli.

Who will be held accountable if the assessors and evaluators make mistakes under pressure of the frenetic timetable? It will not be the British or the French Government. Paragraph 58 of the invitation to promoters states:

"The evaluation carried out by the two Governments will not imply any responsibility for the assumptions, forecasts or analyses contained in the proposals submitted by promoters." That is one of the most discreditable small-print exclusion clauses ever relied on by any public authority. The 100 days of total power will be followed by 100 years of total

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

abdication of responsibility. If we condone that by our votes today, let us not kid ourselves that Parliament will be able to put things right later through the hybrid Bill procedure. The shape, size and very nature of the fixed link project will be determined and set in stone on the day the name of the winning consortium is announced, and only peripheral adjustments will be possible thereafter.

Paragraph 12.42 of the invitation to promoters conveys the flavour of the cursory nature of the hybrid Bill as the Government first envisaged it. The document states:

"During the Bill's passage a Committee is convened to hear over a period of weeks the views of those who have locus standi—being directly affected by the proposals more particularly than the general public—and to consider possible amendments to the Bill."

Many important questions arise from that. Why should the general public be excluded and evidence taken only from a handful of insiders considered to have locus standi? Why should expert witnesses from respected organisations without a direct interest, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England or Friends of the Earth, be excluded? Why will the hearings last only for a period of weeks? It all adds up to inadequate, unfair, rushed and partisan procedures for evaluating the project.

Against that background, Parliament and the public must take a suspicious and sceptical view of the promoters' claims. Disraeli had a good line about "lies, damned lies and statistics."

In the past few weeks, some of the figures released by the promoters' PR men about jobs and traffic forecasts seem to have been plucked out of thin air and multiplied by two or three for good measure. Until the promoters have had their figures subjected to open, detailed, independent scrutiny, all their important forecasts remain nothing more than unreliable guesswork.

The Government, who should be defending the public interest, have no right to accept the consortium's figures for the purpose of taking a decision and then abdicating responsibility for those figures afterwards.

The House should be alerted to the fact that there has been at least one serious and genuinely independent assessment of the promoters' figures. It was published last week by the well known stockbrokers Phillips and Drew. It revealed one central and uncomfortable truth about the Channel fixed link—the project is almost certain to be a monopoly. I know how embarrassing it must be for the Secretary of State, whose political life has been spent championing the free market and the forces of competition, to find himself at the controls of an engine of state patronage handing out a powerful monopoly. I am sure he will do all that he can to avoid that embarrassment. But he should mark the sinister words of the Phillips and Drew report, especially the third paragraph of its conclusions which were based on careful statistical analysis:

"We expect most of the longer regional ferry routes to become uneconomic and close, resulting in a large diversion of traffic to the fixed link."

That is the view of Phillips and Drew and it is my view. What it means is that most of the ferries which now operate to the continent from towns like Hull, Immingham, Yarmouth, Felixstowe, Harwich, Sheerness, Ramsgate, Folkestone, Newhaven, Portsmouth, Poole, Weymouth and Plymouth are likely to be put out of business. That may be disputed by the Secretary of State. But where will

it be disputed? In secret with his own civil servants and before the decision is made. Unless the Secretary of State is prepared to contradict the Phillips and Drew conclusions with his own effective new traffic and financial forecasts, hon. Members who, like myself, represent ferry port towns must recognise that by our votes we will soon be signing the death warrant of the ferry industry. The industry will either die quickly in a cut-price war or it will die by a slow haemorrhage of traffic towards the fixed link. Either way, the killing off of an industry which has great strategic importance in times of war, as the Falklands conflict demonstrated, which employs between 30,000 and 40,000 people and which is part of our maritime way of life, is not a decision to be taken lightly in 100 days' superficial haste by a Minister and his civil servants.

Mr. Roger Stott: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's devastating analysis, with which I absolutely agree. I take up his last interesting point. Ten years ago the British merchant fleet had 1,600 ships registered under the British flag. Today, 10 years later, that figure is 640. Any further losses, especially to our ferry services, will do exactly what the hon. Gentleman predicts.

Mr. Aitken: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The further erosion of the ferry fleet is a matter not just of commercial regret, but of great strategic concern. Parliament should take that point into account carefully.

I wish to say a brief word about the special problems of my constituency in east Kent which contains the second biggest, fastest growing Channel port—Ramsgate. The east Kent coastal towns resent being categorised as part of the prosperous south-east. They are, in effect, much more like north-east towns, with high unemployment, low wages, closing factories and coal mines and a crumbling down-at-heel infrastructure. This sad and seedy side is often masked by the courageous cheerfulness of the people who somehow manage to cope, all too often uncomfortably close to the poverty line.

Those who live in east Kent need some political and economic reality to back up the famous quotation of St. Francis of Assisi, delivered at the door of 10 Downing street—

"Where there is despair, hope."

There has been too much despair for too long in east Kent. But recently there has been some hope. For example, in the town of Ramsgate we are starting to see spirits lift as the economic vitality of the ferry port starts to bring good business into the town. Ramsgate is a new ferry port. Within four years it has built up its cross-Channel traffic from nothing, and it is now Britain's second biggest Channel port. It is a real success story in spite of the inevitable teething troubles. One thousand new jobs have been created and traffic figures are growing at 30 per cent. a year.

Most of the shops, small businesses and hotels owe their survival and modestly growing prosperity to that ferry industry. When I return to metropolitan London from Ramsgate and see the promoters, glossy PR men in their biscuit sun-coloured suits, driving their BMWs to and from the Ritz taking Members of Parliament out to expense account lunches twice the average weekly wage of a Ramsgate worker, I get angry. Those sort of people do not understand what the destruction of a small community's principal employer and central industry will mean in terms of economic and human misery and despair. Promises of temporary construction jobs and new roads are

no substitutes for destroying the going concern of a good industry. On this issue Ramsgate will fight and Ramsgate will be right.

The problems of Ramsgate suggest, as is now well known, that Kent does have special problems, and there is a growing feeling in Whitehall that Kent will have to be bought off. There is much talk of shopping lists, of new roads, of special assisted area status, enterprise zones, sympathy from Ministers and many fine words. But as the Kent farmers say, "Fine words butter no parsnips." The Government have to reconcile their announcement that no public money will be spent on the fixed link with hard cash to meet the demands that will soon be piling in from Kent. British Rail wants £350 million for investment on the Dover line and Kent county council wants £75 million to £100 million for new roads. The east Kent local authority wants special assisted area status and it wants grants for industrial and tourist projects which will probably amount to another £50 million. With £50 million here, £100 million there, £350 million there, pretty soon we will be talking about real money! The midlands and the north may well have something to say about the price of buying Kent off. In any event, it would be an unacceptable and unworkable manoeuvre.

The Channel fixed link is a national, not just a Kent, issue. There should be national concern that the ferry industry in 14 or 15 ports around the country will face closure. There should be national concern that the Government's reputation of fair and open planning procedures has been stained by the refusal to have a public inquiry. In its place there is the frantic 100-day rush of secret political assessment and decision-making. There should be national anxiety, which perhaps is only starting to grow, that the Channel fixed link may have profound and unforeseen consequences for our whole way of life. People are only beginning to ask the question: do we really need or want a Channel fixed link? On that question the great British jury, not having heard the evidence, is still undecided. Alas, the Government do not want to hear any verdict other than the one they have already decided upon. That is the tragedy of this debate, and that is why I shall be in the Opposition Lobby tonight.

8.18 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I wish to follow a different line from the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). I am firmly committed to the fixed link and to the construction of a Channel link. The hon. Gentleman put forward an argument with which I have a great deal of sympathy. I agree that changing the infrastructure radically and paying no attention to its effects on the surrounding countryside and other parts of the country is a recipe for disaster.

That is certainly not the Opposition's view or philosophy—we believe in planning. The Government take the view that, if the fixed link is built, no public money need be put into it and everything can be left to market forces. If that happened I would share the views of hon. Members who have expressed grave disquiet about what would happen in Kent, Scotland, the north, the north-west, the north-east and Wales if the fixed link is built. That argument cannot be sustained. We cannot shy away from progress simply because we are not prepared to plan for the consequences.

Crossing the Channel by ship is not as convenient or quick—and certainly not as good for the country—as a

fixed link. There is a political will on both sides of the Channel to build a fixed link. The capital is available and the people demand it. The project has been on and off for well over 100 years and there is a good possibility that it will be built now. I hope that the House will seize the opportunity with both hands and say that we should commit ourselves in principle to it and worry later about what else we might have to consider to ensure that the disasters of which we have heard do not occur. That is quite possible.

I am not a supporter of the Common Market and I abhor the common agricultural policy, but I support our being in Europe on a geographic basis. We have to accept that much of our trade is done with Europe. It will be better for all parts of the United Kingdom if such trade is made easier. The advantages of a fixed link might well accrue more to Kent and the south-east than elsewhere but it is within the bounds of possibility for the House to arrange matters so that the advantages are more or less evenly distributed.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis), I am sponsored by the National Union of Railwaymen, but I do not share the honour of having been a working railwayman. Nevertheless, I have a long and continuing interest in the railways and rail transport. Both have a vital part to play in the United Kingdom. Contrary to some opinion, the tunnel would benefit the environment and the railways would gain an immense advantage. Manufacturers could load their goods in Manchester or Glasgow knowing that they would arrive in Dusseldorf in three days' time rather than in nine days' time, as at present. We fail to appreciate that, although we trade with Europe, we are put at an enormous disadvantage because of a 20-mile stretch of water.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a tunnel or even a rolling motorway-type tunnel would facilitate lorry traffic and increase the opportunities for transfer from rail to road?

Dr. Marek: Yes. The tunnel would also attract more traffic to the railways. The quantity of transport will increase but, with the tunnel, there would be less traffic on the roads than there would otherwise be. Railways and barges play a much more important part on the continent. A tunnel can do only good for us.

It is said that the fixed link would destroy the Kent countryside and environment. I disagree. Roads in Kent and the south-east are not particularly good, but if money is spent correctly and traffic is kept from the middle of towns and villages by an adequate motorway, the quality of life and the environment will be protected. The M2 is not complete. Indeed, the last bit to Dover is dreadful. Nor is the A20/M20 finished. I am not arguing for development in the south at the expense of development in the north, but there is room for extra infrastructure in the south-east. That would help our manufacturing base—which I fear the Government do not value highly enough—which is to be found mainly in the north.

I have considered all of the schemes. With the exception of that proposed by the Channel Tunnel Group, the goalposts have been moved every two or three weeks. I am not convinced that Channel Expressway has solved the ventilation problem. I hope that the Minister's experts will publish their detailed findings as an annex to the White Paper. The country should have access to detailed

[Dr. Marek]

technical information to decide whether such problems have been solved. The idea of a drive-through tunnel appeals to me. Like the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn), I have driven through the Gothard tunnel. I did not find it so unpleasant after about 10 km. I agree, however, that 50 km is a lot longer.

Mr. Dalyell: Is my hon. Friend aware that the electrostatic precipitators which are advocated in the Channel Expressway brief will stick up into the Channel? Does that not represent a hazard to shipping and support my hon. Friend's case?

Dr. Marek: Yes. However, it is not the electrostatic precipitators that will stick up. The problem is to get rid of carbon monoxide, which involves an island in the middle of the Channel. There is no alternative. I have read many representations about the island or islands. I am not sure that they would be safe. If the Government opt for one of the schemes involving an island or islands, I hope that they will lean over backwards to explain why, and guarantee that it will be safe.

Dr. Godman: There are numerous navigational aids as a result of which such obstacles could be avoided. I seem to remember that the captain of the Torrey Canyon was unable to avoid a natural obstacle, but navigational aids are now much improved. They would protect seafarers and the islands.

Dr. Marek: That might be so, but do the captains of ships invariably use such aids? Will those aids work all the time? I am not an engineer and I might be wrong, but I doubt whether a scheme involving islands in the middle of the Channel is safe.

Mr. David Marshall: I share my hon. Friend's concern about safety but, unlike him, I am not in favour of any fixed link. Does he share my concern about the Channel Tunnel Group's scheme, which involves train loads of double-decker type vehicles packed to the gunwales with cars and lorries? The drivers and passengers of the vehicles that are being carried will be free to roam in compartments. What does he think the effect of a derailment, possibly at high speed, would be in such a tunnel, or even the action of severe braking by the train? Is he not concerned about the safety of the scheme?

Dr. Marek: Of course I am concerned about safety. However, we have experience with the present inter-city network. We know that safety can be ensured, barring acts of god or other such matters. In talking about trains being packed to the gunwales, my hon. Friend is giving away his position slightly. I accept that we must be extremely careful and that safety must be paramount, but it may be that no scheme is completely safe. That can be said of any scheme, and at the end of the day it is a matter of percentages. Nonetheless, I believe that the CTG scheme is much safer than any of the others at present. It is certainly the least environmentally damaging option. Environmental damage in the south-east could be limited by adopting the CTG proposals.

The CTG scheme could coexist with ferries. The short sea ferry routes would have to go but I imagine that routes from Harwich, Folkestone and Hull would remain. The construction of whatever scheme is adopted will span more than one Government or two or three Parliaments. That

means that we must arrive at a bipartisan policy. If the Government of the day are prepared to control the operation of the fixed link, one of the conditions should be that sea ferries, except those operating on the short routes, must remain.

I wish to see all the details of the various proposals in a White Paper. I recognise, of course, the problems of concentrating development in the south-east. I am aware of the problems that will flow from the loss of jobs in shipping. Perhaps it is inevitable that more and more infrastructural development would be channelled into the south-east. However, there would be a spin-off to the advantage of all the other regions. We should not be thinking of picking up crumbs that fall from the table, and it is unfortunate that that is the effect of the present industrial policy. There are a few crumbs here and there and everybody wants them.

If the Government looked after Britain's prosperity and well-being properly and ensured that there were jobs at John o'Groat's, Land's End and Kent, arguments over jobs would not arise. If such an enlightened policy prevailed, it would be obvious to everyone that a fixed link would be to the benefit of the entire country. There are worries only because we are in a difficult industrial and economic period. I do not want 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 workers to be made redundant in Dover. If the scheme goes ahead, it is the job of the Government of the day to ensure that there is diversification, relocation or retraining.

I see that the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) shakes his head. I have no doubt that he is one of the greatest exponents of the free market economy, and in that respect I disagree with him fundamentally. I believe in Government planning. If the Government decide that we must move with the times, as I believe we must, we must ensure that the decision is followed by relocation or retraining so that we do not inflict any unnecessary hardship. The hon. Gentleman and I will have to agree to disagree.

It is decided to go ahead with the project, ferries must remain in the interim. There will be a role for ferries after the construction of the fixed link. Other employment will have to be made available. It is interesting that the CTG proposals do not automatically involve job losses. The Government must accommodate the Opposition and the minor parties. The scheme will span two or three Parliaments and some account must be taken of Opposition Members' legitimate fears.

I hope that the White Paper will explain how the Government will ensure that the majority of the development will not take place on the French side of the tunnel. If there are to be interchange facilities, there must be a 50-50 allocation. The French must get their share of these facilities but they must not be allowed to get any more than that.

I commend the Select Committee on its investigation and report. It has been said by some that the report is not especially good but I do not accept that. The members of the Committee had much expertise and I support the Committee's general recommendations. I support especially its recommendation that the Government must ensure that there is no predatory pricing policy that is followed by exploitation of a monopoly.

I associate myself with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross). I want to see a public inquiry, but that should not be used as a means of delaying the project. I

do not want a long inquiry but it is necessary that we address ourselves to some of the matters subsequent to the decision to go ahead. It must be a quick public inquiry.

If we do not build a tunnel and if there is no enterprise in Britain—as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, if there is no spirit of Brunel or of others who built up Britain 150 or 200 years ago during the industrial revolution—we have no business talking about these matters or anything else, and we might as well pack up the shop and go back home. Let us get on with a scheme this time and build the link.

8.37 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): As the founder and first chairman of the Brunel Society, I share some of the views expressed by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). In a nutshell, I do not think that there is a case for a public inquiry. The issue has always needed a political decision. The speeches of those who have contributed to the debate so far have left us in no doubt that the issue remains a political decision that must be taken by Parliament.

We are faced with a slightly eerie re-run of the debates that took place some years ago on a Channel link. I have always remembered the sad and wistful expression on the face of the late Anthony Crosland when he was forced to cancel the previous project. I have always felt that that announcement went against his own personal views and wishes.

We are considering a transport issue that involves environmental and social considerations, especially for those of my hon. Friends who represent Kent constituencies. It would be arrogant and foolish of any of us to do anything other than pay the closest attention to what they have to say. They and others are right when they argue that there is an environmental price to pay for the project, whichever scheme, if any, is chosen. Much of that price will have to be borne by the taxpayer.

We should be discussing which of the projects best serves the travelling public and public interests generally and least damages the environment. I began by saying that we are discussing a political question, and I was not surprised to hear one or two Members contributing to the debate who were among the strongest opponents of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community. The few letters that I have received from my constituents on this issue tell me that we are faced with yet another attempt to denigrate our membership of the EC. I have received letters from a few flat earthers as well. I remain of the view that whilst we are faced with transport, environmental and social considerations, we must understand that primarily we are taking a political decision. The most tragic irony of all is to hear those on the Opposition Front Bench and some Opposition Back Benchers say that we must try to limit regional damage.

The last tunnel project that we cancelled was a rail-only tunnel. It would undoubtedly have brought the greatest regional benefits to this country and would have done the least possible damage to regional policy. It was the Labour party that cancelled it. That makes me sad, because many hon. Members will be aware of my commitment to this country's railway system.

I wish to make a simple point about the road versus rail argument. The relationship between the percentage of traffic on the road to that on the rail in the proposed schemes will determine the amount of environmental

damage that will be done. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) graphically illustrated the problem that heavy lorries pose to Kent. The simple proposition is that the more traffic that goes on the railway and the further away from Kent it is loaded, the less will be the environmental damage done. That is one of the main factors that I hope the Government will consider when they come to take their decision.

I am sure that Kent does not want to be turned into a car park like the M25 which has already been turned into a car park. The idea of unfettered road-only access by heavy vehicles to a fixed link appals me because it would be an environmental disaster.

We were all impressed by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). Everyone understands the points that he put forward. I do not share his gloomy prognostications about the ferries' inability to exist with a fixed link. I am sure that I shall be put right if I am wrong, but, studying the four proposals, it seems that the higher the cost of the project the greater will be the traffic generation necessary to make it pay and the greater will be the impact on the ferries. That is a simple issue that must be faced.

I regret that we have heard hardly anything tonight about air traffic. One of the advantages of the previous scheme—the rail only scheme—was that it would have taken traffic away from the airlines—Heathrow and Gatwick—on to the rail tunnel. With the advent of the TGV in France and our improved electrification, a fixed link will be a great attraction to the business traveller, and that is good.

At the end of last week I received from the Department of Transport figures which showed that 27.9 per cent. of all international scheduled flights from Heathrow, and 16.7 per cent. of scheduled flights from Gatwick are to destinations 400 miles or less from London. A fixed link would do a great deal to reduce the pressure on our airports. Had we gone ahead with the previous project we might not have had to waste our time discussing Stansted and all the problems that has entailed.

Everyone talks about rail traffic without fully appreciating what can be done. In the last century the South Eastern Railway built a line from Tonbridge to Reading to carry traffic from the north of England, Scotland, and the midlands and the west country to a Channel tunnel. That was built about 100 years ago. The line is still open. Furthermore, the Government have sanctioned—the construction is under way—the reopening of the Snow Hill link through London.

The 250-mile barrier which makes British Rail's freight prospects currently so dismal would be smashed to smithereens by the prospect of a rail tunnel. The further freight has to travel, the more competitive is rail travel. That is one of the most important factors that my colleagues who represent constituencies at a distance from London should bear in mind. That is why I urge them to recognise the importance to their constituencies and the regions of putting as much freight traffic as possible on to the railways.

I should like to comment on the subject of funding guarantees. The funding guarantees given by the promoters are the taxpayers' protection that there will not need to be major public funding of the project. A fixed scheme with guaranteed finance provides the best safeguard against overrun and bankruptcy. I share the anxiety expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Robert Adley]

Ashford and others about the extraordinary moving target that we have had from some of the promoters—in particular, from Mr. Sherwood, who reminds me of the chap who answered the telephone at Accrington Stanley football ground. When asked what time the game began, he answered, "What time can you get here?" The trouble for us is that every time we speak to some of the promoters we gain the impression that they are giving the answers that we want to hear. It is essential that the Government stick to guidelines and to a project which has the merit of consistency.

I share the distaste of some of my colleagues for some of the lobbying activities as well as the changing plans from which we have suffered during the past few weeks.

I ask the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) the same question as I posed to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) when he was speaking. I did not receive an answer. The hon. Member for Wigan appeared angry with me for asking it. I believe that we are all entitled to know where the Labour party stands. We fully understand that there are strains and that there are Members of all parties who have doubts and reservations about the project. We understand the parliamentary reasons that cause the Opposition to pursue the argument for a public inquiry. However, we must all decide where we stand on this project—whether we are or are not in favour, in principle, of a Channel fixed link.

There are problems, and we have heard all about them. We know all about the environmental difficulties. None is insuperable. We need a decision to be taken clearly and, I hope, supported by the majority of Members of the House. There will always be those who, for political, anti-EEC, constituency, transport or other reasons, will never support this project. When the debate is over tonight, I hope that Labour Members will at least feel able to say "We have had our debate. We must recognise that this major project is in our national interest and, despite our reservations, we shall support it." I hope that the House will agree to do that.

8.42 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) advanced a powerful case that the greater the rail component of the option adopted, the fewer will be the adverse consequences on the regions and the periphery of the country because of the points about rail freight that he made so well.

I understand and adopt much of the criticism made by the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) about the hasty and undemocratic procedure adopted by the Government. I shall answer the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch. I am in favour of a fixed link for reasons of trade and tourism and because it is the answer to those on the continent to show that we are no longer an island. In his more lyrical moments, I thought that the hon. Member for Thanet, South was going to talk about "this sceptre'd isle". The quicker that we can be seen symbolically and actually to link ourselves to the continent the better. We shall then disabuse and divest ourselves of the island complex which I believe has damaged our national prospects and consciousness over the years.

In principle, I am in favour of a link with the continent. That might be considered a lofty view unless one studies

in detail the gains and losses of a fixed link. We have had nothing like the great debate that we need to enable us to make up our minds about those gains and losses. I shall not rehearse the points about the likely effect on our ports and ferries, because they have already been made by hon. Members from both sides of the House. Some options will have a greater impact on the future viability of ferries than others.

What about the regional impact? Kent members argue that Kent should enjoy some protection. How much more so should this be argued for those regions on the periphery? As France is building up the Pas de Calais region industrially, will the Government be tempted to follow that road and build up Kent as a pole of attraction to compete with the Pas de Calais? What will then be the repercussions on the regions which are already suffering grievously? The Government must take this north-south argument properly on board and view the project through national spectacles.

This is a major project of national resource allocation. It will affect other investments. It is not enough for the Government to say, "We are not using taxpayers' money. The market will bear the risk." Clearly, because of our limited resources, we cannot do everything. The project will therefore affect major infrastructure investments, whether it is the Morecambe barrage, the Severn barrage or the second Severn crossing. What assurances can the Government give?

Will the additional road investments in Kent occur at the expense of road investments elsewhere in Britain? Up to £400 million may be invested in new rail programmes. What will be the effect on rail investments elsewhere in Britain? As the project must be seen not only in national terms but in EC terms, to what extent has the EC been consulted about the additional resources that it will give Britain for additional road and rail investment? Has the Commission any particular view on the options that are available?

These are major questions. We do not have a basis on which to make an informed decision. If the Government had carried out this exercise democratically and well, we would have had that basis.

I share the Select Committee's views that there are two front runners—the Euroroute and the Channel Tunnel Group proposals. The other options have too many technical and financial uncertainties. The Euroroute proposal is the more imaginative. It seems to accord with what we are told are the wishes of the great British public. However, it is pushing beyond the frontiers of existing technological knowledge. I was in the Foreign Office at the time of the hard sell on Concorde and have noted the cost overruns that have occurred since.

I am sceptical about the salesmen's puffs, especially those from the Euroroute proponents. Their rail component has altered twice since October, when we were told that they intended to construct the rail link as an immersed tube on the sea bed. After French objections from the SNCF, the Euroroute proponents said that they would complete both links simultaneously, both with immersed tubes. It was only on Tuesday last week that they said that they had abandoned their proposal for an immersed tube rail tunnel in favour of a conventional bored tunnel. That change has significant job implications. Euroroute's revised standard version clearly has less job creation potential than its initial proposal. The sums must be worked out again.

I favour the Channel Tunnel Group's proposal because it would give a 24-hour all-weather link. July, August and September are the worst months for fog in the Channel and the period of maximum traffic. This proposal would be the least environmentally damaging and the least costly and would rely on the most proven technology. It would be the project most likely not to affect ferry services adversely. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis) said, that proposal would be likely to have the least adverse effects on the regions because it would boost rail freight traffic. The Channel tunnel would join us to the high-speed European rail network via the TGU to Brussels and Paris. It would be an enormous boost to the rail network which is one of our most under-utilised assets. The Channel Tunnel Group's proposal is the least costly of the options and the one least likely to collapse financially half way across the Channel.

8.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): We have heard a great deal about the Brunels. I regret that the United Kingdom is no longer in the position of world dominance that it held when the Brunels were contemplating the Channel. Technical problems gave their contemporaries reason to pause. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Britain could take advantage of an easier crossing in Europe to sell British goods to the rest of the continent and beyond. After a century during which British Governments have wrestled with the problems of relative international decline, no such confidence exists. The problems that give us reason to pause as we contemplate the possibility of a fixed link between Britain and the rest of Europe have comparatively little to do with technology and everything to do with cost-benefit analysis.

As one who travels to France three or four times a year by ferry and who counts himself lucky if he leaves or arrives on time, I am attracted by the prospect of a form of crossing which will not mean that today's or yesterday's weather or the state of the ferries are reasons for not meeting passengers' expectations. On the other hand, extensive experience of British Rail's southern region and roadworks on the M2 and M20 motorways certainly limit any feeling of euphoria that might otherwise be engendered by a fixed link. At least under the present arrangements some opportunities exist for substituting one carrier for another.

I therefore approach the debate with pessimism on the practical side of the proposals, tempered with optimism on the theoretical side. In theory, I see the faster, easier, more predictable crossing. I see also a further affirmation that in the late 20th century Britain's future lies primarily with the countries of free Europe with which we do 60 per cent. of our trade and with which we are most closely linked in terms of culture and tradition.

It is not surprising that the impetus for this latest affirmation of European solidarity should come from a Prime Minister who has been one of the more trenchant critics of present forms of European unity as well as one who has worked increasingly effectively to improve them.

In theory I see an unparalleled opportunity for British firms to rush their goods cheaply, with predictable delivery times, into the heart of Europe and beyond. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) tried to say, I can imagine Kent filled with new and expanding enterprises which have deserted the M4, the M11 and even

the M8 to set themselves up in a county where industrial land can still be rented at £1.50 per square foot and commercial property at £2 or £2.50 per square foot.

If the rail-only option were chosen, the Kent road would shed hundreds, if not thousands, of vehicles per hour onto the railways, as several of my hon. Friends have said. I can even see new enterprises springing up like mushrooms to mop up not only the 6,000 places that would be lost on the ferries, but to make a sizeable dent in the 19.8 per cent. unemployment rate in parts of east Kent. When I stretch my mind, I can even imagine a sizeable proportion of the predicted 10 million or 12 million cross-Channel passengers stopping in Kent long enough to benefit the Kentish economy.

In practice, why should I not be optimistic? I do not believe that in practice an easier crossing to mainland Europe will result in the United Kingdom capturing a larger share of European trade. It should, as Opposition Members have declared, but it will not on present performance. Let us compare the numbers of English people who cross each day to France to raid the French hypermarkets with the number of French people who make the trip in reverse. Cox's apples, British cider, English cheese and British beer are better than their French equivalents, yet not even food from Britain has reversed the popular belief that the opposite is true. That will not happen until we realise that being in Europe means speaking a European language other than ours.

Thanks to the Kent economic development board I have seen details of the assistance available to the Pas de Calais to ensure that that depressed area of France will derive the principal benefits from the fixed link, if it is built. The average unemployment in that area is only 1.3 per cent. higher than it is in Kent. Its highest unemployment is 1.8 per cent. lower than it is in Kent. The Pas de Calais has already lost most of its obsolete industrial base. Kent has still to lose about 6,000 jobs in its dying coalfields, yet the French Government and the EEC are prepared to pump money into the region on a scale which conjures up the visions of what Rotterdam and the Dutch Government did to British ports.

I understand that any British Government, conscious of Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Govan, will have difficulty in giving preference to Kent, but I also understand that in connection with the fixed link we are talking about competition with the full power of France.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) that in some respects the French will take us for a ride. If the United Kingdom as a whole is to reap the benefit of a fixed link, Kent will have to be helped in the short and medium term to become a centre of excellence which will be a magnet to investment rather than the sump of England through which the national wealth drains away to Paris and the Pas de Calais.

I have enormous respect for the Minister, but he is not the right person to sum up the debate. I shall give some examples of what we want. We welcome the commitment to upgrade the M20 to six lanes, but we wonder whether even that will be enough. We welcome the commitment to continue the investment in Chatham dockyard. My hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner) is prevented from speaking in the debate because she is a Minister, but she has been present for most of the debate and I know that she shares my view. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) is abroad and unable to express his opinion, although Chatham dockyard

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

is in his constituency. The dockyard borders my constituency and many of my constituents work there. The dockyard is potentially one of the most important development sites in Kent. We must be sure that investment continues without hiccup and that it will have enterprise zone status.

If Kent is to compete with France we need a road system in and out of Chatham that will enable the area to realise its full potential. Lille in France is regarded as one of the "research poles" for the whole of France. That means that even under the present regime it can attract grant aid of up to £4,350 per job created. What plans have the British Government to assist the university of Canterbury to match that largesse?

If industrial and commercial land in pockets of Kent is cheap, the same is not true of house prices. We in Kent do not want our areas of outstanding natural beauty to be overwhelmed with new houses, although we need now, and shall need more in the future, to attract skilled labour from other parts of the United Kingdom. Will the Government examine policies on rent controls and other restrictions so as to recreate the possibility of allowing people to move into Kent as tenants, a status which they might be able to afford, rather than keeping them out because they cannot afford to buy?

The fixed link will probably come, more because it can now be built than because anybody in Britain really wants it. I sometimes think that the Prime Minister believes that if she sets a sufficiently steep challenge to British business, it will sharpen itself up to meet it. The evidence for believing that that is how she operates is incontrovertible. The evidence that others are not so resilient is everywhere apparent, although some important strides forward have been made under this Administration. It will be for British industry large and small, and in particular for Kent business large and small, to respond to the challenge. Coming from a constituency which includes part of the county town in which the only sizeable hotel has just closed down, I am not sanguine of success.

Unless the Government plan and execute in partnership with Kent—with a massive investment in roads, depots, manufacturing and commercial sites and in tourism—and unless they work out policies which allow a free market in labour to operate, the fixed link will be a disaster for Kent and a bonanza for France.

9.7 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As a Scot in favour of rail, I will use my three minutes to ask questions.

What thinking do the Government have about accidents, should there be one of the motorway options? What will happen if a lorry jack-knives? We have seen on the M6 how pile-ups, albeit on slippery roads, delay traffic for hours. What contingency plans do the Government have should that happen in mid-Channel? Without being absurd, would there have to be a great reversal of traffic should such an accident occur?

In relation to the psychology of drivers, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) said that, as an advanced driver, he had not had any difficulty in the big tunnels of the Alps. What will be the situation with less advanced drivers? After all, only a few drivers need

suddenly lose their nerve or suffer claustrophobia to cause an accident. My hon. Friends may laugh, but have they ever been stuck in the Dartford tunnel? I have.

Such matters may have been thought through, but there is no mention of them in the literature that I have seen. In other words, are there contingency plans to cope with the situation of a driver suddenly losing his nerve, say, midway through the tunnel? How do the rescue services get through?

The proposals for the expressway suggest that the ventilation problems have been overcome by using the most modern Japanese methods of electrostatic precipitators. Do the Government have a view on their reliability? Many people believe that it is not easy to get exhaust fumes out of a tunnel 25 miles long. If there are to be shafts, as Maureen Tomison suggests, will they, in the view of the Department, be dangerous to shipping?

If the railway tunnel is accepted, are the same problems of exhaust, accident and pile-up serious in the Department's view? I am completely in favour of a rail link, but I am against a road link, until I have answers to the questions asked about it tonight, and many others. If I could have the Secretary of State's attention for a moment, I might get an answer. Does there exist, in the Department of Transport, any assessment of the psychological effects on drivers? When the Under-Secretary of State makes his wind-up speech, will he answer that? Has any thought been given to it? If so, what is it?

9.10 pm

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I am obliged to you for having called me, Mr. Speaker, because so far the only member of the Select Committee to have spoken is the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross). I am obliged also because I am the Chairman of the Tory Back-Bench tourism committee. The effect of the tunnel will be to spread tourism countrywide. That is a point of great interest to me, and a matter that has not been dealt with. I declare an interest as adviser to Best Western Hotels and as governor of the Old Course golf hotel at St. Andrews. I am old enough to remember headlines in the newspapers in the 1930s saying, "Fog over Channel, continent cut off." It was a method of disguising our offshore position. I am naive enough to believe that at long last a decision will be taken and the fog will clear and a tunnel will be built. Unusually in transport matters, I find myself congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on having taken an excellent stance on this matter and got these things afoot.

I am certain that we need the tunnel link, not just for the reasons that have been spelt out tonight, but for many others. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir David Price) and the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) described themselves alternately as an atheist and an agnostic—I almost heard them say, "Thank God." They are doubting Thomases. I am not. I am a believer that not only should there be a Channel link—a proposal that has been talked about since the time of Napoleon, and on which there have recently been inquiries and debates ad nauseam—but that there should be an alternative to having merely a rail tunnel, which would be nothing more than a shuttle.

The St. Gothard tunnel showed that, once a through-tunnel system was created through the mountain, the service shuttling cars never ran again. We should be in

danger of making a decision in favour of obsolescence if we put in a rail-only tunnel, although I feel that a rail connection, without vast marshalling yards, is essential.

On resolution No. 130 in the Select Committee I voted for the Euroroute proposals. It will create 30,000 jobs, 8,000 of which will be in Scotland, 8,000 in the north-east and many in the midlands. The work will be spread, and the proposal follows the widely expressed public view that there should be a link with a road structure through which people can freely drive and through which our freight can be expedited in its delivery to the continent. In a public opinion poll, over 70 per cent. said that they were in favour of such a route.

For those reasons, the Select Committee got to the stage on resolution No. 130 that we had to vote either for the Channel Tunnel Group or for the Euroroute proposals. Having been advised by technical advisers of great eminence that the proposal for the Expressway was not proven and that the fume extraction problems were too great, we moved a vote. It was carried in favour of the Channel Tunnel Group proposals by one vote—the Chairman's casting vote.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier), the Chairman, is an excellent man. He cannot be with us tonight as he is in the Falklands. He is, quite properly, a member of the National Union of Railwaymen. His casting vote made the decision. In taking this great and exciting decision in favour of a Channel tunnel, not only is a rail link necessary but in the opinion of the vast majority—not reflected in this debate but elsewhere—a road connection is additionally necessary.

9.15 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): At the outset I should perhaps explain that I did not find the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) amusing. His remarks were extremely interesting, and that is another reason why the Opposition are taking such a stance in this issue.

The debate has clearly demonstrated that the building of a fixed link across the English Channel will have an enormous impact on the entire United Kingdom mainland. That has been fully appreciated and understood by every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate, yet we are about to embark on the biggest civil engineering project this century with only the merest pretence at an intellectually objective assessment of the consequences that are bound to impact on a host of strategic issues throughout the United Kingdom.

During his visit to Kent the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said a lot about a thorough analysis, and, according to him, it has taken place. The schemes have been submitted to his Department, and the analysis must be finished by 17 December—next week. That will be only 31 days since it began.

Ministers in the Department of Transport will have a month at most to try to master the immensely complicated analysis that has been provided by expert opinion, and they will have to do so before they reach a decision. They will have to do so between eating their Christmas pudding and having a glass of whisky when they usher in the new year. I do not envy them that task, but that is the time scale about which we are talking.

The view of the Opposition and of many people outside the House—certainly it is the view of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken)—is that the Government

are embarking on a procedure that is totally unacceptable. Even the Secretary of State's apparent conversion to the virtues of public consultation has failed to reassure the people that the project will be subjected to the widest possible scrutiny. That is not surprising. I do not know how any consultations can be meaningful when the Secretary of State merely announces in the national press that public comment will be welcome, and invites those who are interested to go to their local government offices to obtain details of the proposals, only to find that all that is available are four flimsy publicity brochures that contain almost no information at all. The Secretary of State then asks for comments on this important issue to be prepared and submitted to him within a few working weeks. That is no way in which to treat the nation. It deserves a much more objective and long-term look at the problems associated with the fixed link.

The *Financial Times*, in its editorial of 29 November, was right when it said:

"Essex residents, it will be recalled, enjoyed the luxury of three lengthy public inquiries spread over several decades before they were finally obliged to accept that an expansion of Stansted airport would take place. A fixed Channel link is a project on a quite different scale with a host of environmental and social implications, few of which have been properly aired. Yet all the people of Kent are being offered are a few glossy brochures from the promoters themselves, a series of short meetings with Mr. David Mitchell, a junior Transport Minister, and an as yet unspecified right to petition" in respect of a hybrid Bill. The editorial continues:

"The issue of consultation has nothing to do with arguments about the desirability of a fixed Channel link. It would be quite consistent to believe fervently that a fixed link was in the national interest but simultaneously to hold that in a mature democracy a public inquiry was an essential precursor to any form of legislation, hybrid or otherwise."

I could not have put it better myself.

Mr. Peter Rees: If the hon. Gentleman could not have put it better himself, will he state clearly whether or not the Labour party believes the fixed Channel link to be in the national interest?

Mr. Stott: I heard the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech. Representing the port of Dover, which employs 11,000 people, for him to say what he said was a disgrace to his constituents. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Many hon. Members have paid tribute—

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) asked the hon. Gentleman a perfectly proper and correct question. Instead of attacking my right hon. and learned Friend, who is doing a magnificent job for his constituents, unlike the hon. Gentleman, will the the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the Labour party is in favour of the jobs and prosperity which go with the link or whether it is against them?

Mr. Stott: If the Secretary of State would cease to interrupt me, I might find time to answer that question. I did not start my speech until a quarter past nine to enable his hon. Friends to speak. If the Secretary of State keeps interrupting me, I might not get round to answering the question.

Many hon. Members paid tribute to the Chairman and members of the Transport Select Committee, who produced their report in a short space of time. I echo those tributes to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier), but I profoundly disagree with his

[Mr. Stott]

conclusions in respect of a public inquiry. As hon. Members will know, because they will have read the report, the Committee stated:

"However, it should be recognised that the idea of a fixed Channel link is not new and that various proposals have been widely discussed over many years. The Committee does not therefore recommend that a public inquiry be held."

Even the consultative arrangements that are laid down in the Government's Blue Book have not been adhered to.

The British Ports Association, which recently wrote to the Department of Transport about the issue, said:

"In Section 5, the outline draft of duties to be undertaken by consultants and government experts in the assessment about to be undertaken of various schemes, paragraph 5.11.2 requires an assessment of the adequacy of consultation. This specific reference deals with the question of whether the promoters have prior to finalising their proposals, carried out appropriate consultation with all relevant local authorities, expert bodies and other interested parties.

None of the promoters have sought formal meetings with the BPA nor indeed with any of their members on a sufficiently general basis to, in our view, be capable of being said to be representative. Had they consulted us we would have raised a number of issues, particularly in relation to their freight traffic forecasts. That opportunity has been denied us and since there are now very sharp differences between the BPA's members and the . . . promoters"

on a whole range of issues, we demand more time to examine those proposals.

There have been many concerns expressed tonight over a wide range of issues related to the viability of the projects. Hon. Members who raised those questions—I see the hon. Member for Thanet, South in his place—will recognise, as I do that there are several examples of large civil engineering projects over the past decade or so, although not quite as large as those that we are discussing tonight. I will refer to several of them.

The Thames barrier was originally estimated to cost £23 million. The actual cost was £461 million. The NatWest tower was supposed to cost £15 million. It ultimately cost £115 million. The Humber bridge—[*Interruption.*] I am being fair. I am not choosing my statistics on a partisan basis. The Humber bridge was originally intended to cost £19 million and it ended up costing £120 million. Those are examples of cost over-runs on very large civil engineering contracts.

The civil engineering contracts that we are talking about this evening, whether they be for Euroroute, Eurobridge, or the Channel Tunnel Group's twin-bore railway tunnel, are for massive programmes of construction. If inflation rises over the next two or three years by even 2 per cent., the interest on the capital employed, particularly for the bigger construction projects will be enormous.

The Minister will know that the port of Dover, in volume and value terms, handles more cargo than the port of Felixstowe. When I was in Dover in September—I wrote to the right hon. and learned Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) to say that I would be there—I was told that the earning capacity of the port in freight, passengers, duty-free sales, and so on, was about £500 million a year. That is what Dover earns as a port. More freight goes through Dover than through Felixstowe. Under the Euroroute scheme, the interest on the money borrowed in one year would be £5 billion.

It is difficult, in present circumstances, to arrive at an authoritative estimate of the job losses in Britain's ports

that would result from a fixed link. Nevertheless, it is possible to provide some reference points for the efficiency of a fixed link, based on the figures of the current British ports industry. In 1984, the last year for which figures are available, the total container and roll-on/roll-off traffic in the ports of the Thames, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire going to or coming from foreign locations represented 1.702 million units. If a fixed link were to attract just 30 per cent. of the total cargo that goes through the ports which is 0.5106 million units, it would be almost equal to the traffic passing through the ports of Medway, Ramsgate, Folkestone, Newhaven, Portsmouth and Southampton.

According to a manpower survey in 1983, that group of ports employed 5,300 workers in direct port and stevedoring jobs. We all know that there are many ancillary jobs attached to each port that I have mentioned. There is a strong possibility—I put it no higher than that because I have grave doubts—that the actual market share of a fixed link, particularly if it is Euroroute or Channel Expressway is 100 per cent. I put it to the Minister that when spending such vast sums of money, one has to generate that volume to make a return on the capital. If those companies were out to get 80, 90 or 100 per cent. of the market across the Channel, it would have devastating effects on the ports of Colchester, London, Medway, Whitstable, Ramsgate, Dover, which employs 11,000 people, Folkestone, Newhaven, Shoreham, Portsmouth, Cowes and Southampton.

In addition to the loss of jobs that may follow the introduction of a fixed link, there would be considerable wasting of investment in port infrastructure, such as quays, terminal buildings, railheads, and so on. I cannot understand why the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was so blasé in giving way to the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company's attempt to force through a Bill in the House to extend the facilities on its quays. The Minister must be aware of the damage to the ports that could follow if a fixed link were agreed to, particularly the port that was under debate a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East) *rose*—

Mr. Stott: I do not have time to give way.

Most of the debate concerning a fixed link has concentrated on the ports situated close to the Channel crossings, and the effect that such a fixed link will have on a wider range of our port facilities in the United Kingdom. That has not yet been touched upon, except in a sedentary intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

I draw the attention of the House to the recent report by Phillips and Drew, which says:

"We believe that a more important source of new traffic will be the diversity from smaller ferry ports to the fixed link. At present most of the long haul ferry routes from Newhaven, Portsmouth, Felixstowe, and Harwich etc are only marginally profitable and are effectively subsidised by the ferry companies' profitable short sea routes."

It goes on to say more about that, but ends by saying:

"The effects of the closure of many of the regional routes does not seem to be taken into account in some of the fixed link assessments."

That is right. If the ferry companies are forced off the Channel route, some of their marginal enterprises in other ports in the United Kingdom will suffer.

As the hon. Member for Thanet, South said, we are an island nation. I agree that we have a long and proud

maritime history. On many occasions from this Dispatch Box I have said that I am profoundly worried about the decline of our ports industry and our merchant fleet. I do not think that there can be anybody, whether he agrees or disagrees with a fixed link of whatever nature, who can doubt that if the fixed link were to go ahead, it would have a devastating effect on our ports and merchant shipping fleet.

I have already said to the hon. Member for Thanet, South that 1,600 ships were registered under the British flag in 1975. Today that figure is down to 640. This great island nation has only 640 ships registered under the British flag. Any further losses, particularly in ferry capacity, would have a profound effect upon our defence capabilities. The House must recognise that. We would have serious difficulties in mustering a maritime operation on the same scale as during the Falklands conflict. [*Interruption.*]

Some of my hon. Friends mentioned the problems of the regions. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) spoke of his worries. Throughout the debate, and during the weeks preceding it, all of us have had several submissions. One is worthy of further scrutiny. Presumably it has been given to all of us. It comes from the northern regional consortium, a group of local authorities representing the north of England—somewhere that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellett-Bowman), who keeps barracking me from a sedentary position, represents. Therefore, she should take more notice of what the consortium said. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said, the consortium is profoundly worried that the creation of a fixed link would act like a magnet to draw and suck in industry in and around that area. I, too, am very worried about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North and other hon. Members discussed the employment implications of a fixed link. It is undeniable that in the short term a fixed link could generate thousands of jobs, but I suspect more on the French side.

The Pas de Calais, which has been mentioned, is in a special development area, and will attract millions of pounds of European finance. Even if some of the employment projections are true, there is serious doubt whether all the contracts will come to the United Kingdom. The Phillips and Drew report says:

"However, the employment created during the construction phase will be of little interest to the directors of the winning scheme whose primary concern, as a commercially financed company, will be to maximise the returns to their shareholders. Obviously, this will involve buying materials outside the EEC should they be priced more competitively."

That is absolutely right. Therefore, there can be no guarantee that the so-called jobs that will come from the construction of a fixed link will come to the United Kingdom. The other day someone said to me that a German company, employing Portuguese labour, using Japanese steel, might be involved in one of these projects. That is not as fanciful as it may seem. It is a real problem. I am not convinced that all the figures that have been bandied about by Euroroute, Eurobridge and others regarding the employment potential will stand the test of scrutiny.

We are asking the House of Commons to make a judgment; do we seriously believe that there is sufficient information or that the projects that have been submitted to the Government for evaluation are right? Do we

seriously believe that long-term employment and the ports industry will be adequately protected by what the Government decide to do in a couple of weeks' time? I do not. That is my personal view.

I fully understand that many of my hon. Friends have said that they prefer a fixed link. Whether they have that preference or another, the House of Commons and the nation should be given the benefit of a public inquiry before we do anything else. That is what we are demanding tonight.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): The debate has served three useful purposes. First, it has enabled hon. Members to present their views to the Government on whether there should be a Channel fixed link. Secondly, hon. Members have been able to discuss what characteristics the link should have and which of the four proposals are individually preferred. Thirdly, hon. Members have highlighted areas of special concern that need safeguards or investigation. Throughout the debate, Ministers have listened carefully and they will ensure that the wide range of matters that has been drawn to our attention is passed to the assessment teams.

The Government value the advice in the report of the Select Committee. I thank the Committee for completing its report so soon, at considerable inconvenience to its members.

In opening the debate for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) asked whether the Government would carry out a proper assessment of the important matters arising from the Channel fixed link proposals. Britain has 20 assessment teams and the French Government have similar assessment teams at work, which are considering in depth the individual areas, such as civil engineering and road safety. I can tell the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that, in the case of accidents, there will be television surveillance and arrangements for cross-over from one lane to another. There will also be buffer parks at the entrances to any drive-through system, so the hon. Gentleman's point has been met by the promoters. However, we shall be studying the assessment to discover whether it has been met adequately.

Assessment teams deal with programme, capital and operating costs, project management and third party insurance. I was asked earlier what would happen if the scheme had to be aborted. I can add that promoters are required to put up a bond or insurance to cover the cost of removing any structure that has been erected by them. [*Laughter.*] Hon. Members may laugh, but I have been asked for this information.

Traffic, revenue, cash flow, tax and revenue implications and financing will be assessed not only by the Treasury but by Schroder Wagg, the merchant bankers. It is essential that the project is viable and that no public money is needed. That is a *sine qua non*. The scheme must be viable, and that is why we have such a strong team to assess whether it is.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) said that the interest costs were high, and asked whether inflation would be taken into account. I can assure him that it will be. The hon. Gentleman said that the costs were £5 billion. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman employs a turf accountant to do his accountancy, because he has

[Mr. David Mitchell]

exaggerated the figure 10 times. Having sat on the Transport Bill Committee with the hon. Gentleman, I am not surprised by a 10 times exaggeration in his figures.

Mr. Stott: I realise now that what I said was incorrect. It was an easy mistake to make. I meant to say £500 million.

Mr. Mitchell: I could not resist pulling the hon. Gentleman's leg on that faux pas.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North asked about shifting sands in the Channel. The hydrology team will assess that. We also have a frontier control team, which will assess the risks of rabies. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) was anxious about that. We have assessment teams for maritime and environmental requirements. I can tell the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin) that tunnel spoil is one matter that they will consider. In this case, we have also brought in land use consultants, Roger Tym and Partners and others to help us with that assessment. We have assessment teams considering the adequacy of the consultation process, the protection of the marine environment, economic and employment implications, legal matters, railways technology, inland rail, inland road infrastructure and security. I assure the hon. Member for Linlithgow that the psychological effects of driving through a long tunnel will be considered by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory, which is advising us in that area.

Our assessment team will consider those important matters in depth.

Mr. Dalryell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Member for Wigan took some of my time and I have many points to cover.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that the decision has been taken. I must tell her that no decision has been taken, and cannot be taken until we have received the reports of the assessment teams. The hon. Lady also said that a poll had been conducted in Folkstone, and she made much play with a newspaper questionnaire. The House will recognise that someone who fills in a questionnaire and returns it must have strong feelings about the matter. Understandably, those who have strong feelings in Folkstone are the people whose properties will be affected. Had the hon. Lady wished to give the House a fair assessment, she would have added that the chamber of commerce and the hoteliers association in Folkstone voted in favour of a fixed link.

Many Kent Members, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ashford (Mr. Speed) and for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch), asked about roads. Whether there is a fixed link or not, there will be a substantial increase in traffic through Kent in the future. We estimate that by 2003, the peak average flow will have increased from 7,000 cars a day to 13,000 cars a day. Lorries will have increased from 500 to 1,100 a day, and coaches from 400 to 700 a day. Of course, the promoters have produced higher figures taking into account the traffic that they expect to attract. Although we have not yet agreed those figures, we are considering them critically.

As my hon. Friends have said, that means that we need road improvements. Not only will the M25 be completed by 1986, but the missing link of the M20 will be completed in 1989—subject, of course, to delays caused by a public inquiry. But provided that we are not delayed, we shall make rapid progress. The Maidstone bypass will be improved and the A20 between Folkestone and Dover will go ahead when we know the form of the link. There will be a dual three-lane carriageway from the M25 to the mouth of whatever project is chosen.

Several hon. Members asked about the future of rail. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover asked whether a fixed link would remove normal British Rail services to his constituency. British Rail tells me that it will not. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury mentioned the substantial potential gains for railways, railway passengers and freight. For example, the journey from London to Paris would take about three and quarter hours, which compares favourably with flying from Heathrow and with going by ferry. It also compares favourably in terms of passenger frustration and the fact that passengers must often carry their baggage. The hon. Member for Carlisle, who is sponsored by the National Union of Railwaymen and understands such matters, was right to say that if British Rail can obtain a link with the European rail network, the long distances will give an enormous advantage to rail compared with road transport and should succeed in shifting much freight traffic from the roads onto the railways. Many of my hon. Friends have covered that point.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) asked about investment and in particular whether British Rail would be able to carry out the investment required. British Rail will be able to invest, subject to its proposals being financially viable when presented to the Government. If the promoters require more from British Rail than it can economically and viably justify, the promoters will have to pay the additional costs.

Many hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Deptford, have referred to the environmental effects of the link. The right hon. Gentleman remarked that the heritage of the Kent coast is everybody's heritage. He is absolutely correct and during the debate many hon. Members have taken the same view.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover referred to Shakespeare cliff and the downs behind the cliffs. I have been to see the cliffs and the downs and I understand the impact that the link will have in that locality. The assessment team working jointly with the Department of the Environment and with Land Use Consultants recognise that, wherever the link is situated, it will cause environmental damage. The Government do not seek to hide that. It is an essential part of our assessment and the House will have to consider in due course, whether the link is worth the environmental damage that we report.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover and my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford raised the question of monopoly. That is a very important aspect and the Government will include it in their assessment of the possible effects on the ferries. While the promoters are free to decide tariffs and commercial policy, they will be subject to United Kingdom and EC competition legislation. That means that there is the potential for

reference to the Office of Fair Trading, investigation, report, persuasion and, if that fails, reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. After investigation, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has power to invite the Secretary of State to make an order requiring changes, so there are substantial safeguards in relation to monopoly.

Mr. Aitken: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mitchell: I have many points to cover, and I have no time to give way now.

There has also been substantial consultation by the promoters. For example, they have produced a substantial parcel of material on environmental assessment work. That parcel of material is available from responsible organisations, direct from the promoters or through local authorities in the affected area. In addition, there have been field visits by the promoters and an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall of the Palace of Westminster. I must refer rather apologetically to the room at the Department of the Environment which was mentioned during the debate. I agree with hon. Members who visited it that it was inadequate, and it has now been changed. If hon. Members visit the DOE again they will find a larger room with a quarter of the space devoted to each of the proposers, with videos, models, and things of that nature.

Mr. Silkin: The hon. Gentleman may have given instructions for the room to be changed, but as it was closed today it seems that the hon. Gentleman's action was not taken early enough to assist in this debate.

Mr. Mitchell: The room is kept locked unless people wish to see it, as we do not wish to risk its being vandalised. There are expensive models provided by the promoters and we have a responsibility to ensure that they are properly looked after.

There has also been consultation by the Government. We have inserted advertisements in a number of newspapers and the large number of replies received are all being assessed. Officials have visited every council in Kent and have reported the results of their assessment. As has been mentioned, I have been on listening visits to Kent. Ministers have also listened to today's debate. We have had the advice of the Select Committee and there will also be the hybrid Bill procedure.

The essence of the Opposition attack has been to ask why there is to be no public inquiry. The real question is why the Opposition have fastened on to that. It is a cynical attempt to obtain support from opponents by pretending that it will not kill the project, thus reconciling the differences between Members sponsored by the National Union of Railwaymen and those sponsored by the National Union of Seamen and the Transport and General Workers Union. A public inquiry would take three years. There is no way in which investors and investment institutions will keep money standing idle and earmarked for the project if it does not go forward at this stage.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight asked for a short, sharp local public inquiry. The Select Committee dealing with the hybrid Bill has the right, with the leave of the House, to sit in Dover or Folkestone to hear local opinions. I think that it is better for people in the area to be able to present their views direct to the Select Committee rather than to a Queen's counsel.

If there is a public inquiry, the Secretary of State appoints the inspector, who reports back to the Secretary

of State and the Secretary of State then takes the decision. In this case, rather than a local public inquiry, it is right that the matter should be decided by the highest tribunal in the land—this House and the House of Lords—as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells) pointed out so clearly. Had we had a public inquiry and a hybrid Bill—statutorily, we must have a hybrid Bill—objectors would have incurred the cost of going through their objections twice. Moreover, a hybrid Bill Committee, rather than a public inquiry, has already been approved by the Select Committee.

Many Members have questioned the point of having a fixed link at all. In 1980-81, the Select Committee on Transport had plenty of time to consider the matter in depth. Its report refers to the benefits of speed, convenience, comfort and a clear passage free of adverse weather conditions and the like. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury described his recent trip across the Channel, the difficulty of humping luggage around, and so on. With the fixed link, one could board a train in London and be in Paris three and a quarter hours later, without any of the problems associated with lugging baggage and being at the mercy of bad weather.

Hon. Members have referred to the spirit of Brunel and Victorian achievement, but that is not the point. There are perceived advantages to passengers, to exporters and to much of our economy. A rail link to all the major EEC markets would be a major change. It is the assessment of users and the advantage to so many of our fellow men and women in this country that attract investors and promoters alike. Let us see whether our assessments prove that the link is a worthwhile project from their point of view. If it is, let it go ahead. If it is not, let it fall.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 181, Noes 277.

Division No. 19]

[10.00 pm

AYES

Adams, Allen (Paisley N)	Cohen, Harry
Aitken, Jonathan	Coleman, Donald
Anderson, Donald	Conlan, Bernard
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Cook, Robin F. (Livingston)
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Corbett, Robin
Ashton, Joe	Corbyn, Jeremy
Atkinson, N. (Tottenham)	Cormack, Patrick
Banks, Tony (Newham NW)	Cox, Thomas (Tooting)
Barnett, Guy	Crowther, Stan
Barron, Kevin	Cunningham, Dr John
Bell, Stuart	Dalyell, Tam
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil (L'li)
Bennett, A. (Dent'n & Red'sh)	Deakins, Eric
Birmingham, Gerald	Dewar, Donald
Bidwell, Sydney	Dixon, Donald
Boyes, Roland	Dobson, Frank
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Dormand, Jack
Brown, Gordon (D'f'mline E)	Douglas, Dick
Brown, Hugh D. (Provan)	Dubs, Alfred
Brown, N. (N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)	Duffy, A. E. P.
Brown, R. (N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Brown, Ron (E'burgh, Leith)	Eadie, Alex
Buchan, Norman	Edwards, Bob (W'h'mpt'n SE)
Caborn, Richard	Evans, John (St. Helens N)
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.	Ewing, Harry
Callaghan, Jim (Heyw'd & M)	Fatchett, Derek
Campbell-Savours, Dale	Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Canavan, Dennis	Fields, T. (L'pool Broad Gn)
Carter-Jones, Lewis	Fisher, Mark
Clark, Dr David (S Shields)	Flannery, Martin
Clarke, Thomas	Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Clay, Robert	Forrester, John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Foster, Derek
Cocks, Rt Hon M. (Bristol S.)	Foulkes, George

Fraser, J. (Norwood)
 Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
 Garrett, W. E.
 George, Bruce
 Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
 Godman, Dr Norman
 Golding, John
 Gould, Bryan
 Gourlay, Harry
 Hamilton, James (M'well N)
 Hamilton, W. W. (Fife Central)
 Hancock, Mr. Michael
 Hardy, Peter
 Harman, Ms Harriet
 Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
 Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
 Haynes, Frank
 Healey, Rt Hon Denis
 Heffer, Eric S.
 Hogg, N. (C'nauld & Kilsyth)
 Holland, Stuart (Vauxhall)
 Home Robertson, John
 Hoyle, Douglas
 Hughes, Dr. Mark (Durham)
 Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen N)
 Hughes, Sean (Knowsley S)
 Janner, Hon Greville
 John, Brynmor
 Jones, Barry (Alyn & Deeside)
 Kilroy-Silk, Robert
 Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
 Lambie, David
 Lamond, James
 Leighton, Ronald
 Lewis, Ron (Carlisle)
 Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
 Lloyd, Tony (Stretford)
 Lofthouse, Geoffrey
 McCartney, Hugh
 McDonald, Dr Oonagh
 McKay, Allen (Penistone)
 MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
 McNamara, Kevin
 McTaggart, Robert
 McWilliam, John
 Madden, Max
 Marek, Dr John
 Marshall, David (Shettleston)
 Martin, Michael
 Mason, Rt Hon Roy
 Maxton, John
 Maynard, Miss Joan
 Meacher, Michael
 Michie, William
 Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
 Miller, Dr M. S. (E Kilbride)
 Mitchell, Austin (G't Grimsby)
 Moate, Roger
 Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon

NOES

Adley, Robert
 Alexander, Richard
 Alison, Rt Hon Michael
 Alton, David
 Amess, David
 Ancram, Michael
 Arnold, Tom
 Atkins, Robert (South Ribble)
 Atkinson, David (B'm'th E)
 Baker, Rt Hon K. (Mole Vall'y)
 Baker, Nicholas (Dorset N)
 Baldry, Tony
 Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
 Bellingham, Henry
 Benyon, William
 Best, Keith
 Bevan, David Gilroy
 Biggs-Davison, Sir John
 Blackburn, John

O'Brien, William
 O'Neill, Martin
 Park, George
 Parry, Robert
 Patchett, Terry
 Pavitt, Laurie
 Pike, Peter
 Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
 Prescott, John
 Radice, Giles
 Randall, Stuart
 Redmond, M.
 Rees, Rt Hon M. (Leeds S)
 Rees, Rt Hon Peter (Dover)
 Richardson, Ms Jo
 Roberts, Ernest (Hackney N)
 Robertson, George
 Robinson, G. (Coventry NW)
 Rooker, J. W.
 Rowlands, Ted
 Sedgemore, Brian
 Sheerman, Barry
 Shore, Rt Hon Peter
 Short, Ms Clare (Ladywood)
 Short, Mrs R. (W'hampt'n NE)
 Silkin, Rt Hon J.
 Skinner, Dennis
 Smith, C. (Isl'ton S & F'bury)
 Smith, Rt Hon J. (M'kl'ds E)
 Soley, Clive
 Spearing, Nigel
 Stewart, Rt Hon D. (W Isles)
 Stott, Roger
 Stradling Thomas, Sir John
 Strang, Gavin
 Straw, Jack
 Taylor, Rt Hon John David
 Taylor, Teddy (S'end E)
 Thomas, Dafydd (Merioneth)
 Thomas, Dr R. (Carmarthen)
 Thompson, J. (Wansbeck)
 Thorne, Stan (Preston)
 Tinn, James
 Torney, Tom
 Wardell, Gareth (Gower)
 Wareing, Robert
 Weetch, Ken
 Welsh, Michael
 White, James
 Williams, Rt Hon A.
 Wilson, Gordon
 Winnick, David
 Woodall, Alec
 Young, David (Bolton SE)

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe and
 Mr. Ron Davies.

Butcher, John
 Butler, Rt Hon Adam
 Butterfill, John
 Carlisle, John (Luton N)
 Carlisle, Kenneth (Lincoln)
 Carlisle, Rt Hon M. (W'ton S)
 Cartwright, John
 Cash, William
 Chalker, Mrs Lynda
 Chapman, Sydney
 Choje, Christopher
 Churchill, W. S.
 Clark, Hon A. (Plym'th S'n)
 Clark, Dr Michael (Rochford)
 Clark, Sir W. (Croydon S)
 Clarke, Rt Hon K. (Rushcliffe)
 Clegg, Sir Walter
 Cockeram, Eric
 Conway, Derek
 Coombs, Simon
 Cope, John
 Corrie, John
 Cranborne, Viscount
 Crouch, David
 Currie, Mrs Edwina
 Dickens, Geoffrey
 Dicks, Terry
 Dorrell, Stephen
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
 Dover, Den
 du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
 Durant, Tony
 Dykes, Hugh
 Eggar, Tim
 Emery, Sir Peter
 Evennett, David
 Eyre, Sir Reginald
 Fairbairn, Nicholas
 Favell, Anthony
 Fenner, Mrs Peggy
 Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
 Fletcher, Alexander
 Fookes, Miss Janet
 Forman, Nigel
 Forth, Eric
 Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
 Fox, Marcus
 Franks, Cecil
 Fraser, Peter (Angus East)
 Freud, Clement
 Fry, Peter
 Galley, Roy
 Gardner, Sir Edward (Fylde)
 Garel-Jones, Tristan
 Glyn, Dr Alan
 Goodlad, Alastair
 Gow, Ian
 Gower, Sir Raymond
 Grant, Sir Anthony
 Greenway, Harry
 Gregory, Conal
 Griffiths, Sir Eldon
 Griffiths, Peter (Portsm'th N)
 Grist, Ian
 Ground, Patrick
 Grylls, Michael
 Gummer, Rt Hon John S
 Hamilton, Hon A. (Epsom)
 Hamilton, Neil (Tatton)
 Hampson, Dr Keith
 Hanley, Jeremy
 Hannam, John
 Harris, David
 Harvey, Robert
 Haselhurst, Alan
 Hawkins, C. (High Peak)
 Hawksley, Warren
 Hayes, J.
 Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
 Hayward, Robert

Heddle, John
 Henderson, Barry
 Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
 Hickmet, Richard
 Hicks, Robert
 Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
 Hind, Kenneth
 Hirst, Michael
 Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
 Holland, Sir Philip (Gedling)
 Holt, Richard
 Hordern, Sir Peter
 Howard, Michael
 Howarth, Gerald (Cannock)
 Howell, Rt Hon D. (G'dford)
 Howell, Ralph (Norfolk, N)
 Howells, Geraint
 Hubbard-Miles, Peter
 Hunt, David (Wirral)
 Hunt, John (Ravensbourne)
 Hunter, Andrew
 Irving, Charles
 Jackson, Robert
 Jessel, Toby
 Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
 Jones, Gwilym (Cardiff N)
 Jones, Robert (Herts W)
 Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
 Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
 Kershaw, Sir Anthony
 King, Roger (B'ham N'field)
 Knowles, Michael
 Knox, David
 Lang, Ian
 Lawler, Geoffrey
 Lawrence, Ivan
 Lee, John (Pendle)
 Leigh, Edward (Gainsbor'gh)
 Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
 Lester, Jim
 Livsey, Richard
 Lloyd, Ian (Havant)
 MacKay, Andrew (Berkshire)
 MacKay, John (Argyll & Bute)
 Maclean, David John
 McNair-Wilson, M. (N'bury)
 Major, John
 Maples, John
 Marshall, Michael (Arundel)
 Mather, Carol
 Mawhinney, Dr Brian
 Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
 Mayhew, Sir Patrick
 Merchant, Piers
 Meyer, Sir Anthony
 Miller, Hal (B'grove)
 Miscampbell, Norman
 Mitchell, David (NW Hants)
 Morrison, Hon C. (Devizes)
 Morrison, Hon P. (Chester)
 Moynihan, Hon C.
 Murphy, Christopher
 Neale, Gerrard
 Neubert, Michael
 Newton, Tony
 Norris, Steven
 Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
 Osborn, Sir John
 Ottaway, Richard
 Page, Sir John (Harrow W)
 Page, Richard (Herts SW)
 Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
 Parris, Matthew
 Penhaligon, David
 Pollock, Alexander
 Powell, William (Corby)
 Powley, John
 Price, Sir David
 Prior, Rt Hon James
 Raison, Rt Hon Timothy

Rhodes James, Robert
 Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
 Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
 Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
 Roberts, Wyn (Conwy)
 Robinson, Mark (N'port W)
 Roe, Mrs Marion
 Ross, Stephen (Isle of Wight)
 Rossi, Sir Hugh
 Rost, Peter
 Rowe, Andrew
 Rumbold, Mrs Angela
 Sackville, Hon Thomas
 St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
 Sayeed, Jonathan
 Shaw, Giles (Pudsey)
 Shaw, Sir Michael (Scarb')
 Shelton, William (Streatham)
 Shepherd, Colin (Hereford)
 Shepherdy, Richard (Aldridge)
 Shersby, Michael
 Skeet, T. H. H.
 Smith, Tim (Beaconsfield)
 Soames, Hon Nicholas
 Speed, Keith

Speller, Tony
 Spence, John
 Spencer, Derek
 Spicer, Jim (Dorset W)
 Spicer, Michael (S Worcs)
 Squire, Robin
 Stanbrook, Ivor
 Steen, Anthony
 Stern, Michael
 Stevens, Lewis (Nuneaton)
 Stevens, Martin (Fulham)
 Stewart, Andrew (Sherwood)
 Stewart, Ian (Hert'dshire N)
 Sumberg, David
 Taylor, John (Solihull)
 Temple-Morris, Peter
 Terlezki, Stefan
 Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
 Thompson, Donald (Calder V)
 Thompson, Patrick (N'ich N)
 Thorne, Neil (Ilford S)
 Thornton, Malcolm
 Thurnham, Peter
 Townsend, Cyril D. (B'heath)
 Tracey, Richard

Trippier, David
 Twinn, Dr Ian
 van Straubenzee, Sir W.
 Viggers, Peter
 Waddington, David
 Wainwright, R.
 Wakeham, Rt Hon John
 Waldegrave, Hon William
 Walker, Bill (T'side N)
 Wallace, James
 Waller, Gary
 Ward, John
 Wardle, C. (Bexhill)
 Warren, Kenneth
 Watson, John
 Watts, John
 Wells, Bowen (Hertford)

Wells, Sir John (Maidstone)
 Wheeler, John
 Whitfield, John
 Whitney, Raymond
 Wilkinson, John
 Winterton, Mrs Ann
 Wolfson, Mark
 Wood, Timothy
 Woodcock, Michael
 Wrigglesworth, Ian
 Yeo, Tim
 Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
 Mr. Peter Lloyd and
 Mr. Francis Maude.

Question accordingly negated.

[Continued in column 719]