

PRIME MINISTER

c.c.

Mr. Wicks

Mr. Flesher

#### WESTLAND

The Chief Whip telephoned to say that after a certain amount of to-ing and fro-ing, the following scenario for this afternoon has been clarified.

Mr. Kinnock will rise at 3.30 on a point of order to ask the Speaker whether there has been any notification of a statement by the Prime Minister. He will be told that there has not. He will bluster that this is disgraceful, and will go on to say that in the circumstances the Opposition has no choice but to use Wednesday for a debate on Westland. (It will be a whole day debate.) The Lord Privy Seal will then make a business statement followed by more questions; after that the Trade and Industry Secretary will make his statement.

The Chief Whip's strong recommendation is that you should be on the bench at 3.30 for Mr. Kinnock's point of order.

CDP

CDP

13 January, 1986.

Loyden, Edward  
 McCartney, Hugh  
 McDonald, Dr Oonagh  
 Maclennan, Robert  
 McNamara, Kevin  
 McTaggart, Robert  
 McWilliam, John  
 Madden, Max  
 Marshall, David (*Shettleston*)  
 Martin, Michael  
 Mason, Rt Hon Roy  
 Maxton, John  
 Maynard, Miss Joan  
 Meacher, Michael  
 Michie, William  
 Mikardo, Ian  
 Millan, Rt Hon Bruce  
 Mitchell, Austin (*G't Grimsby*)  
 Morris, Rt Hon A. (*W'shawe*)  
 Morris, Rt Hon J. (*Aberavon*)  
 Nellist, David  
 O'Brien, William  
 O'Neill, Martin  
 Park, George  
 Parry, Robert  
 Patchett, Terry  
 Pendry, Tom  
 Penhaligon, David  
 Pike, Peter  
 Prescott, John  
 Radice, Giles  
 Randall, Stuart  
 Redmond, M.  
 Rees, Rt Hon M. (*Leeds S*)  
 Richardson, Ms Jo  
 Roberts, Allan (*Bootle*)  
 Roberts, Ernest (*Hackney N*)  
 Robertson, George  
 Robinson, G. (*Coventry NW*)  
 Rogers, Allan  
 Rooker, J. W.  
 Ross, Stephen (*Isle of Wight*)

Rowlands, Ted  
 Sedgemore, Brian  
 Sheerman, Barry  
 Sheldon, Rt Hon R.  
 Shore, Rt Hon Peter  
 Short, Ms Clare (*Ladywood*)  
 Silkin, Rt Hon J.  
 Skinner, Dennis  
 Smith, C. (*Is'ton S & F'bury*)  
 Smith, Rt Hon John  
 (*Monklands, East*)  
 Snape, Peter  
 Soley, Clive  
 Spearing, Nigel  
 Steel, Rt Hon David  
 Stewart, Rt Hon D. (*W Isles*)  
 Stott, Roger  
 Strang, Gavin  
 Straw, Jack  
 Thomas, Dafydd (*Merioneth*)  
 Thomas, Dr R. (*Carmarthen*)  
 Thompson, J. (*Wansbeck*)  
 Thorne, Stan (*Preston*)  
 Torney, Tom  
 Wallace, James  
 Wardell, Gareth (*Gower*)  
 Wareing, Robert  
 Weetch, Ken  
 Welsh, Michael  
 White, James  
 Wigley, Dafydd  
 Williams, Rt Hon A.  
 Wilson, Gordon  
 Winnick, David  
 Woodall, Alec  
 Wrigglesworth, Ian  
 Young, David (*Bolton SE*)

Tellers for the Noes:  
 Mr. Allen McKay and  
 Mr. Ray Powell.

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

## Westland plc

10.27 pm

### The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Leon Brittan):

I am most grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make this statement as I should like to clarify what I said earlier today, and to apologise to the House if what I said gave a misleading impression.

This afternoon in making my statement to the House I was asked whether the Government had received a letter from British Aerospace concerning the meeting which took place between Sir Raymond Lygo and myself on 8 January. I replied that I had not done so. In answer to further questions whether any member of the Government had received a letter from Sir Raymond Lygo, I replied that I was not aware of any letter from Sir Raymond Lygo to any one else either. There has since been an announcement by 10 Downing street that a letter was received there which the Prime Minister saw just before coming over to the House. It was not from Sir Raymond Lygo, but from Sir Austin Pearce, the chairman of British Aerospace, and was marked private and strictly confidential. Although I was made aware of the existence of the letter minutes before I left for the House I had not been informed of its contents, nor did I know whether Sir Austin Pearce was prepared for its existence to be made public. In view of the fact that the letter was marked "Private and strictly confidential," it was essential that I took great care in what I said to protect the strict confidentiality attached to it by Sir Austin Pearce, while answering questions accurately.

I understand that since I made my statement, Sir Austin has agreed with the Prime Minister's office that the existence of his letter can be disclosed, although not its contents. I had no intention of misleading the House in this matter, and therefore wished to come to explain this sequence of events immediately. If it is thought that I have in any way misled the House I apologise unreservedly.

**Mr. John Smith** (*Monklands, East*): If the Secretary of State had made an unreserved and unqualified apology, we would have been happy to accept it. I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman of the sequence of events. The right hon. Member for Henley (*Mr. Heseltine*) asked about a letter. The Secretary of State replied:

"I have not received any such letter."

That is quite true. There were questions from other hon. Members. At one point, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (*Mr. Skinner*) asked about a letter from the chairman of British Aerospace, who happens to be Sir Austin Pearce. My hon. Friend finished his question by saying that the Secretary of State "should come clean."

The verbatim reply by the right hon. and learned Gentleman was: If it helps the hon. Gentleman, I am not aware of any letters from Sir Raymond Lygo to anyone else either."

In case the Secretary of State seeks to draw a distinction between a letter from Sir Raymond Lygo and a letter from Sir Austin Pearce, I remind him that, later in the exchange, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (*Mr. Brown*) asked:

"Is the Secretary of State aware of any letter received by Her Majesty's Government from British Aerospace?" The matter could hardly be more clearly put. The

Holt, Richard  
 Hordern, Sir Peter  
 Howard, Michael  
 Howarth, Alan (*Stratf'd-on-A*)  
 Howarth, Gerald (*Cannock*)  
 Howell, Rt Hon D. (*G'ldford*)  
 Howell, Ralph (*Norfolk, N*)  
 Hubbard-Miles, Peter  
 Hunt, David (*Wirral*)  
 Hunt, John (*Ravensbourne*)  
 Hunter, Andrew  
 Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas  
 Jackson, Robert  
 Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick  
 Jessel, Toby  
 Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey  
 Jones, Gwilym (*Cardiff N*)  
 Jones, Robert (*Herts W*)  
 Jopling, Rt Hon Michael  
 Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith  
 Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine  
 Key, Robert  
 King, Roger (*B'ham N'field*)  
 Knight, Greg (*Derby N*)  
 Knight, Dame Jill (*Edgbaston*)  
 Knowles, Michael  
 Knox, David  
 Lamont, Norman  
 Lang, Ian  
 Latham, Michael  
 Lawler, Geoffrey  
 Lawrence, Ivan  
 Lee, John (*Pendle*)  
 Leigh, Edward (*Gainsbor'gh*)  
 Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark  
 Lewis, Sir Kenneth (*Stamf'd*)  
 Lightbown, David  
 Lilley, Peter  
 Lloyd, Ian (*Havant*)  
 Lloyd, Peter, (*Fareham*)  
 Lord, Michael  
 Luce, Rt Hon Richard  
 Lyell, Nicholas  
 McCrindle, Robert  
 McCurley, Mrs Anna  
 Macfarlane, Neil  
 MacGregor, Rt Hon John  
 MacKay, Andrew (*Berkshire*)  
 MacKay, John (*Argyll & Bute*)  
 Maclean, David John  
 McNair-Wilson, M. (*N'bury*)  
 McNair-Wilson, P. (*New F'st*)  
 McQuarrie, Albert  
 Madel, David  
 Major, John  
 Malins, Humfrey  
 Malone, Gerald  
 Maples, John  
 Marland, Paul  
 Marlow, Antony  
 Marshall, Michael (*Arundel*)  
 Mates, Michael  
 Mather, Carol  
 Mawhinney, Dr Brian  
 Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin  
 Mayhew, Sir Patrick  
 Merchant, Piers  
 Meyer, Sir Anthony  
 Miller, Hal (*B'grove*)  
 Mills, Iain (*Meriden*)  
 Mills, Sir Peter (*West Devon*)  
 Miscampbell, Norman  
 Mitchell, David (*Hants NW*)  
 Moate, Roger  
 Monro, Sir Hector  
 Montgomery, Sir Fergus  
 Moore, Rt Hon John  
 Morrison, Hon C. (*Devizes*)  
 Morrison, Hon P. (*Chester*)  
 Moynihan, Hon C.

Murphy, Christopher  
 Neale, Gerrard  
 Nelson, Anthony  
 Neubert, Michael  
 Nicholls, Patrick  
 Norris, Steven  
 Onslow, Cranley  
 Oppenheim, Phillip  
 Ottaway, Richard  
 Page, Sir John (*Harrow W*)  
 Page, Richard (*Herts SW*)  
 Parris, Matthew  
 Patten, Christopher (*Bath*)  
 Patten, J. (*Oxf W & Abdgn*)  
 Pattie, Geoffrey  
 Pawsey, James  
 Pollock, Alexander  
 Porter, Barry  
 Portillo, Michael  
 Powell, William (*Corby*)  
 Powley, John  
 Prentice, Rt Hon Reg  
 Price, Sir David  
 Proctor, K. Harvey  
 Raffan, Keith  
 Raison, Rt Hon Timothy  
 Rathbone, Tim  
 Renton, Tim  
 Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon  
 Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas  
 Ridsdale, Sir Julian  
 Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm  
 Roberts, Wyn (*Conwy*)  
 Roe, Mrs Marion  
 Rost, Peter  
 Rowe, Andrew  
 Rumbold, Mrs Angela  
 Ryder, Richard  
 Sackville, Hon Thomas  
 Sainsbury, Hon Timothy  
 St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.  
 Sayeed, Jonathan  
 Shaw, Giles (*Pudsey*)  
 Shaw, Sir Michael (*Scarb'*)  
 Shelton, William (*Streatham*)  
 Shepherd, Colin (*Hereford*)  
 Shepherd, Richard (*Aldridge*)  
 Shersby, Michael  
 Silvester, Fred  
 Sims, Roger  
 Skeet, Sir Trevor  
 Smith, Sir Dudley (*Warwick*)  
 Smith, Tim (*Beaconsfield*)  
 Soames, Hon Nicholas  
 Speed, Keith  
 Speller, Tony  
 Spencer, Derek  
 Spicer, Jim (*Dorset W*)  
 Squire, Robin  
 Stanbrook, Ivor  
 Stanley, John  
 Stern, Michael  
 Stevens, Lewis (*Nuneaton*)  
 Stewart, Allan (*Eastwood*)  
 Stewart, Andrew (*Sherwood*)  
 Stewart, Ian (*Hertf'dshire N*)  
 Stokes, John  
 Stradling Thomas, Sir John  
 Sumberg, David  
 Taylor, John (*Solihull*)  
 Taylor, Teddy (*S'end E*)  
 Temple-Morris, Peter  
 Terlezki, Stefan  
 Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.  
 Thomas, Rt Hon Peter  
 Thompson, Patrick (*N'ich N*)  
 Thorne, Neil (*Ilford S*)  
 Thornton, Malcolm  
 Thurnham, Peter  
 Townend, John (*Bridlington*)

Townsend, Cyril D. (*B'heath*)  
 Tracey, Richard  
 Trippier, David  
 Trotter, Neville  
 Twinn, Dr Ian  
 van Straubenzee, Sir W.  
 Viggers, Peter  
 Waddington, David  
 Wakeham, Rt Hon John  
 Walden, George  
 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  
 Wolfson, Mark  
 Wood, Timothy  
 Woodcock, Michael  
 Yeo, Tim  
 Young, Sir George (*Acton*)  
 Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:  
 Mr. Donald Thompson and  
 Mr. Francis Maude.

## NOES

Abse, Leo  
 Adams, Allen (*Paisley N*)  
 Anderson, Donald  
 Archer, Rt Hon Peter  
 Ashdown, Paddy  
 Ashley, Rt Hon Jack  
 Ashton, Joe  
 Atkinson, N. (*Tottenham*)  
 Bagier, Gordon A. T.  
 Banks, Tony (*Newham NW*)  
 Barnett, Guy  
 Barron, Kevin  
 Beith, A. J.  
 Bell, Stuart  
 Benn, Rt Hon Tony  
 Bennett, A. (*Dent'n & Red'sh*)  
 Bermingham, Gerald  
 Bidwell, Sydney  
 Blair, Anthony  
 Boyes, Roland  
 Bray, Dr Jeremy  
 Brown, Gordon (*D'f'mline E*)  
 Brown, N. (*N'c'tle-u-Tyne E*)  
 Brown, R. (*N'c'tle-u-Tyne N*)  
 Brown, Ron (*E'burgh, Leith*)  
 Bruce, Malcolm  
 Buchan, Norman  
 Caborn, Richard  
 Callaghan, Jim (*Heyw'd & M*)  
 Campbell, Ian  
 Campbell-Savours, Dale  
 Carlile, Alexander (*Montg'y*)  
 Carter-Jones, Lewis  
 Cartwright, John  
 Clark, Dr David (*S Shields*)  
 Clarke, Thomas  
 Clay, Robert  
 Clelland, David Gordon  
 Clwyd, Mrs Ann  
 Cocks, Rt Hon M. (*Bristol S.*)  
 Cohen, Harry  
 Coleman, Donald  
 Conlan, Bernard  
 Cook, Robin F. (*Livingston*)  
 Corbett, Robin  
 Cox, Thomas (*Tooting*)  
 Craigen, J. M.  
 Crowther, Stan  
 Cunliffe, Lawrence  
 Cunningham, Dr John  
 Dalyell, Tam  
 Davies, Rt Hon Denzil (*L'Ili*)  
 Davies, Ronald (*Caerphilly*)  
 Davis, Terry (*B'ham, H'ge H'l*)  
 Deakins, Eric  
 Dewar, Donald  
 Dixon, Donald  
 Dobson, Frank  
 Dormand, Jack  
 Douglas, Dick  
 Dubs, Alfred  
 Eadie, Alex

Eastham, Ken  
 Edwards, Bob (*W'h'impt'n SE*)  
 Evans, John (*St. Helens N*)  
 Ewing, Harry  
 Fatchett, Derek  
 Faulds, Andrew  
 Field, Frank (*Birkenhead*)  
 Fields, T. (*L'pool Broad Gn*)  
 Fisher, Mark  
 Flannery, Martin  
 Foot, Rt Hon Michael  
 Forrester, John  
 Foster, Derek  
 Foulkes, George  
 Fraser, J. (*Norwood*)  
 Freson, Rt Hon Reginald  
 Freud, Clement  
 Garrett, W. E.  
 George, Bruce  
 Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John  
 Godman, Dr Norman  
 Gould, Bryan  
 Gourlay, Harry  
 Hamilton, James (*M'well N*)  
 Hamilton, W. W. (*Fife Central*)  
 Hancock, Mr. Michael  
 Hardy, Peter  
 Harman, Ms Harriet  
 Harrison, Rt Hon Walter  
 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  
 Howell, Rt Hon D. (*S'heath*)  
 Hoyle, Douglas  
 Hughes, Roy (*Newport East*)  
 Hughes, Sean (*Knowsley S*)  
 Hughes, Simon (*Southwark*)  
 Janner, Hon Greville  
 Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy (*Hillh'd*)  
 John, Brynmor  
 Johnston, Sir Russell  
 Jones, Barry (*Alyn & Deeside*)  
 Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald  
 Kennedy, Charles  
 Kilroy-Silk, Robert  
 Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil  
 Kirkwood, Archy  
 Lambie, David  
 Lamond, James  
 Leadbitter, Ted  
 Leighton, Ronald  
 Lewis, Ron (*Carlisle*)  
 Lewis, Terence (*Worsley*)  
 Litherland, Robert  
 Livsey, Richard  
 Lloyd, Tony (*Stretford*)  
 Lofthouse, Geoffrey

Secretary of State replied: "As to the first part of the question by the hon. Gentleman, I have already answered that point in reply to the hon. Member for Bolsover."

Any reasonable person would have accepted from that sequence of replies that the Secretary of State did not know of any letter from British Aerospace. He has told us today that he did know that such a letter had been received by the Prime Minister. I think that the Secretary of State should now say—[HON. MEMBERS: "Resign."] Let us see how things develop. He should now say, "I am unreservedly sorry for having misled the House of Commons to the extent that I implied that a letter had not been received when it had been."

On the issue of confidentiality, I say to the Secretary of State that I appreciate that there might be a problem about a letter marked "Private and confidential". He should have said precisely that to the House—that a letter had been received which had been given on a confidential basis and that he could not take that matter further because of questions of commercial or other forms of confidentiality. That would have had the merit of being a truthful answer to the House of Commons.

Throughout the whole of that performance this afternoon, the Prime Minister sat in silence. She had more knowledge than any other hon. Member because she was the recipient of that letter and, no doubt, had read it before she came across to the House of Commons. In that circumstance, why did the Prime Minister not even lean across to the Secretary of State, who was within inches of her throughout the whole of the debate, and correct him if he was at some stage misleading the House? I ask the Prime Minister to apologise to the House tonight or tomorrow for what was said by the Secretary of State.

The House of Commons will not be satisfied that it knows the full truth about this rather confused matter until the terms of that letter are published so that they can be compared with the account of the meeting given by the Secretary of State this afternoon.

**Mr. Brittan:** At the outset and at the conclusion of what I had to say, I made it clear that if the opinion of the House was that my answers were misleading, I would apologise unreservedly. I should have thought that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) could at least give me credit for that. As it happens, I do not think that the answers that I gave bear the interpretation that he has put upon them. If he thinks that they gave that impression I am content to apologise and withdraw. On any view, I have unequivocally set the record straight tonight at the earliest opportunity that I could. [Interruption] If the right hon. and learned Gentleman says that he asked me to do so, I can assure him that I had taken the decision to do so before he made that request.

As for saying that the letter was marked "Strictly private and confidential", the right hon. and learned Gentleman should be well aware that in matters of this kind it is the existence of the letter as much as its contents that is strictly private and confidential and that the confidentiality is one imparted by the author of the letter and no one else.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): How can the Secretary of State claim that it was not his intention to mislead the House when he now explains that he gave his answers, as he did, because he did not wish to

acknowledge at that stage the existence of a letter whose contents were marked "Strictly private and confidential"? Was it not clearly his intention to conceal from the House the existence of that letter? In pursuance of that letter was he given guidance by the Prime Minister before those exchanges, as he did not appear to be given any during them?

**Mr. Brittan:** The hon. Gentleman is not on a correct point. I had to tread the narrow path of not breaking the confidentiality of the chairman of British Aerospace and answering the questions accurately. I readily concede that in doing so I answered the questions strictly, but I answered them to the best of my ability. If I failed to answer them in a way that the House considers to be completely satisfactory I have indicated my readiness to apologise. I know that the hon. Gentleman will accept that.

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): May I put it to my right hon. and learned Friend that if the writer of a letter, for his own reasons and in his own interests, chooses to mark that letter "In confidence" it would be a breach of confidence for the letter's existence to be disclosed.

**Mr. Brittan:** That is the view that I took.

**Mr. John Morris** (Aberavon): The House of Commons is always generous to anyone who makes a fulsome apology. Does the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry not realise, however, that the way he has apologised tonight shows that he does not know the difference between evasion after evasion, after question after question was put to him; when he told the House that he was speaking only for himself and for no one else; when he said that there was no letter from Sir Raymond Lygo; and when he replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown)? In those circumstances, whatever the nature of the original letter, there was an hour of questioning available when his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister could have told him what the position was, and for him to have told the House when he should.

**Mr. Brittan:** I do not accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's strictures. I should have thought that what I said to the House is a completely clear account of what occurred, and expresses a readiness to apologise to the House for any misleading impression given. I should have thought that any attempt to extract more than that was motivated more by a concern to extract the maximum from this matter than a concern for the truth.

**Sir John Page** (Harrow, West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend rather surprised that a private and confidentially marked letter should have had such a wide circulation to my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and apparently a large number of Opposition Members?

**Mr. Brittan:** I think that I had better not comment on that.

**Mr. Roy Jenkins** (Glasgow, Hillhead): Is it not the case that, although the behaviour of the Secretary of State has been pathetic, the behaviour of the Prime Minister has been much the more extraordinary? It was clear from halfway through the exchanges this afternoon that the crux of the exchanges was the question of whether there was a letter from British Aerospace. For the Prime Minister to

[Mr. Roy Jenkins]

sit there for half an hour and allow the Secretary of State to mislead the House was a most extraordinary procedure. Although what the Secretary of State said may just be within the formal bounds of the truth, the margin is so narrow that we shall count our spoons quickly whenever they are together again.

**Mr. Brittan:** The right hon. Gentleman was not in the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, he was."] I did not spot him. If he was there, he was there—[HON. MEMBERS: "Apologise."] I certainly apologise. I did not see him. If the right hon. Gentleman is unable to appreciate any of the consequences of receiving a letter that is marked "Strictly private and confidential", whether that is a matter for me or for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he is quite unaware of the normal obligations that exist in society.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that the highly personalised politicking that has been going on will in any way help the workers of Westland, the board of Westland, and those who depend on the future of this industry? Since the Opposition already have a full Supply day on Wednesday to debate this subject, and since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to speak on that occasion, would it not have been more appropriate had the Opposition waited until Wednesday, when my right hon. Friend would have communicated the contents of the letter, had they been material to the shareholders' meeting, which has now been postponed until Friday?

**Mr. Brittan:** I agree with my hon. Friend that we have moved a long way from Westland.

**Mr. Robert C. Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) so rightly said, an unqualified apology is received very sympathetically by the House. He has exposed himself by making this statement at least as a stranger to the truth. If I can remain in order by describing the conduct of the Secretary of State tonight, he has disgraced himself, but the Prime Minister has disgraced the House of Commons and the country by her silence this afternoon.

**Mr. Brittan:** I do not think that that commentary calls for any counter-commentary.

**Mr. Patrick Cormack** (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State accept that this is not a time for semantics or qualification? Does he not feel that his inglorious part in this long and unhappy chapter should come to an end?

**Mr. Brittan:** I accept neither the description nor the conclusion.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Does the Secretary of State recall that when I asked the question, I referred to any letters from the chairman of British Aerospace. In his answer, as was recounted by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), he said that no letter had been received from Sir Raymond

Lygo. That was not the question that I asked him. The House will always accept an apology from someone who unwittingly misleads the House, but when a Minister, under close examination, knowing of such a letter, misleads the House, not unwittingly but deliberately in cahoots with the Prime Minister, he has no alternative but to go—and to take the Lady with him.

**Mr. Brittan:** The hon. Gentleman is not correct in his description of what I did because he fails to give any weight whatsoever to the fact that a letter was received marked "Strictly private and confidential", the existence of which I was not at liberty to disclose.

**Mr. Cranley Onslow** (Woking): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that anyone who has listened to what he has said and has heard what has been said against him would accept that—with the exception of those right hon. and hon. Members who want to make mischief—he has given the House a reasonable explanation and an adequate apology?

**Mr. Brittan:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): This afternoon I asked whether it would not be more accurate—[*Interruption.*] to say that if the Secretary of State did not read the letter, the Prime Minister did. Was that not an opportunity for one colleague at least to say to another on the Government Front Bench what the truth was? Why did the Prime Minister not take that opportunity to save a lot of time and trouble for the House and to say quietly and gently what the truth was?

**Mr. Brittan:** The confidentiality attached to that letter was not something which the Prime Minister had any more right to waive than I. It was a confidentiality imparted by Sir Austin Pearce and it was for him to decide how he wished that letter to be treated.

**Several Hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. These matters will be discussed when the issue is debated on Wednesday. Mr. Nicholas Ridley.

**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept your ruling about the termination of questions, but is it not in order to point out that a large number of hon. Members who were present this afternoon for the statement asked questions based upon the answers then given by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? A few of us would like to find out whether his selective amnesia is permanent or only temporary.

**Mr. Speaker:** It would be impossible to have a complete re-run of what happened this afternoon—[*Interruption.*] Order. This is a very narrow statement and we have a full day's debate on the matter on Wednesday.

**Several Hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Speaker:** No.

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[Continued in column 877]

Trade and Industry? The wider issues are Cabinet responsibility and the balance of defence procurements between Europe and the United States. If no such statement is forthcoming, will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that the Prime Minister will participate in the debate that he has just announced?

**Mr. Biffen:** Obviously it will be within your competence, Mr. Speaker, to decide how wide the debate may go on Wednesday. However, I should be surprised if the right hon. Gentleman were disappointed.

**Mr. Geoffrey Dickens** (Littleborough and Saddleworth): May I ask the Leader of the House whether we may know the terms of the motion that we shall be asked to debate on Wednesday?

**Mr. Biffen:** The terms are not yet available, but they will be in good time.

**Mr. Gordon Wilson** (Dundee, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that many of us from Scotland knew that part of the debate on Wednesday would be given over to the problem of the Gart — er [HON. MEMBERS: "— cosh."]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. We all suffer from slips of memory.

**Mr. Wilson:** Given my anger about the matter, it is hardly surprising that that should have happened. Why is the debate to be abandoned, particularly as people have been marching down from Scotland to England? When will we have a debate on that crucial matter, in which Scotland is far more interested than it is in the Westland Helicopters' problem?

**Mr. Biffen:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand at once that the decision not to proceed with the debate was in the gift of the Opposition. I shall look at the wider issues that he mentioned.

**Mr. Patrick Cormack** (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister take part in the debate on Wednesday?

**Mr. Biffen:** My hon. Friend need not fret. He will not be disappointed.

**Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth** (Stockton, South): Can the Leader of the House be a little more precise? Is he not aware that the statements made last week by the former Secretary of State for Defence have profound implications both for national security and for the whole conduct of government in this country? Is he not also aware that the House will be disappointed to learn that the Prime Minister is not to make a statement this afternoon? Will he therefore make it clear that the Prime Minister will speak during the debate on Wednesday?

**Mr. Biffen:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will in no sense be disappointed by the content and outcome of Wednesday's debate.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): Does my right hon. Friend know whether the Opposition, in choosing this subject for debate, propose to treat it as a matter for the various spokesmen of the sponsoring Departments, in opening and winding up the debate, or whether they propose to throw in some heavier guns?

**Mr. Biffen:** I shall not respond to the mean remarks that have been made from behind me. The actual participants are for the Opposition themselves to determine, but the Government will be fielding the highest and foremost team.

## Westland plc

3.41 pm

**Mr. Speaker:** Statement, the Home Secretary. — *Interruption.* Order. Even I can make mistakes! Statement, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

**The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Leon Brittan):** With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should add, in my present capacity.

Throughout last year, Westland plc was facing financial difficulties. The company's position reflected, among other things, a worldwide slump in demand for civil helicopters. Against this background Sir John Cuckney, who became chairman in June 1985, sought a partnership with a substantial industrial group which could offer both finances and commercial strength. United Technologies expressed an interest in taking a substantial minority shareholding.

Subsequently, Fiat joined United Technologies in a joint proposal to take a minority shareholding in Westland. The Government, however, encouraged Westland to explore fully in addition the possibility of an alternative European-based proposal. This led to the development of proposals from a consortium comprising Aerospatiale, Agusta and MBB, which were later joined by British Aerospace.

I announced in my statement to the House of 16 December that the board of Westland had decided to recommend to shareholders the proposals put forward by United Technologies and Fiat. I explained that the Government were not bound by the recommendation of the national armaments directors of the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy that certain helicopter requirements should in future be met solely from helicopters designed and built in Europe. That remains the position. I also explained the action that the Government had taken to ensure that Westland had an alternative European-based offer to consider, but emphasised that it was for Westland to decide the best route to follow to secure its future and that of its employees. At no stage did the Government collectively determine on a preference for a particular solution.

At its meeting on 19 December the Cabinet confirmed the policy that I had previously announced. It was also decided that no Minister was entitled to lobby in favour of one proposal rather than another. That decision was unanimously approved by the members of the Cabinet.

On 1 January my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out clearly in a letter to Sir John Cuckney that as long as Westland continues to carry on business in the United Kingdom the Government will support the company in pursuing British interests in Europe. My right hon. Friend also made it clear that the Government would resist to the best of their ability attempts by others to discriminate against Westland.

The alternative solutions put to Westland have been presented in some quarters as offering a choice between collaboration with Europe and collaboration with the United States. In fact, the Government welcome collaboration with both Europe and the United States. Both the proposals put to the board have a European

involvement. The Government will continue to support Westland in pursuing British interests in Europe, whichever solution is implemented.

A number of assertions have been made in recent days about my own and the Government's position on this matter. I shall be happy to answer questions on these specific points.

The position now is that the board of Westland has unanimously recommended revised proposals from United Technologies and Fiat to shareholders. Revised proposals from the European consortium, now joined by GEC, have also been circulated to shareholders. The Government hope that the matter can be resolved quickly in the interests of the company and its employees.

**Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East):** Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that it is rather curious for a Secretary of State to come to the House after a series of detailed allegations have been made by a former colleague and say nothing whatever about those allegations? Will he understand that the Opposition, at least, do not think that he is the appropriate person to answer questions about the Government's conduct? The Prime Minister should have come to the House today to answer questions posed by a colleague in whom she placed sufficient confidence to give him substantial responsibilities on behalf of her Government.

So far as the Secretary of State, with his responsibilities, is involved, is it not clear that his statement today adds little to what has already been said? May I ask him one detailed question to which I should like his answer? In his statement on 16 December he told the House:

"In view of the urgent necessity for a deal to be concluded quickly, the Government decided that from 13 December they would not be bound by the national armaments directors' recommendation unless Westland had by then received a firm offer from the three European companies, which the board would recommend to its shareholders." — *[Official Report, 16 December 1986; Vol. 89, c. 35.]*

When and how did the Government reach that decision —*[Interruption.]*—collectively?

The Secretary of State told us that the Government had decided that Ministers would not lobby for either solution. May I ask him about his activities in connection with an interview that he had with Sir Raymond Lygo, the chief executive of British Aerospace, in his office at the Department of Trade and Industry? The Secretary of State will be aware of what has been said in recent days about that interview. Is there a contemporaneous written record of the interview between Sir Raymond and himself, bearing in mind that it would be normal Government practice for such a record to be taken by his private secretary or by officials in his Department? Does that record exist, and, if it does, can it be made available to Members of the House so that they can make a judgment as to what happened and test the accounts that we have been given? Will the Secretary of State understand that what we are interested in in that regard is the contemporaneous written record, which would automatically be made?

If it was the Government's decision that Ministers should keep out of the matter and leave it to the shareholders to decide on both proposals, which were clearly in circulation, why on earth did the right and learned Gentleman decide to speak to Sir Raymond Lygo at all? What was his purpose in calling him into his room

and discussing the matter with him? Why was there an admitted reference in the course of that conversation to anti-United States sentiment and to the consequences of British Aerospace's involvement in Airbus, leading to a cancellation perhaps of American orders for Airbus? Why did the Secretary of State think that it was relevant to raise that matter with Sir Raymond Lygo in the context of a discussion on Westland Helicopters? What was his purpose in raising it if it were not to influence him in one direction or another?

If the Secretary of State says that he was merely discussing the state of orders for British Aerospace, does he not think it remarkable that that very evening Sir Raymond Lygo took the matter of his conversation sufficiently seriously to telephone each of his directors on the board of British Aerospace to acquaint them with the communication that he had received from the Secretary of State that very afternoon? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not understand that unless he gives a full account of what was said to Sir Raymond Lygo the impression will continue to circulate widely in Britain that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was saying one thing to Parliament, that he was even-handed, and doing another thing in practice and seeking to influence the outcome of the deal?

If Westland is unable, because of its articles of association and its constitution, to decide effectively in favour of either of the proposals, what do the Government propose to do?

**Mr. Brittan:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked, first, when the decision that I announced on 16 December as having been taken by the Government with regard to the national armaments directors' recommendation was made, and in what form. The answer is that the decision was taken collectively at a meeting of Ministers on 9 December.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman went on to ask a number of questions about my meeting with Sir Raymond Lygo. The circumstance of the meeting was that Sir Raymond was, in any event, due to meet my hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology to discuss, among other things, the Airbus. Therefore, it seemed to me that it would have been wholly artificial if I did not see Sir Raymond as well, and I shall explain why that was so.

Let me make it clear that it is untrue to say that in the course of the meeting I made any suggestion that British Aerospace should withdraw from the European consortium or that its participation was contrary to the national interest. On the contrary, the Government's position was that it was for Westland to decide which course to follow. However, what I said then, and continue to believe, is that the nature and tone of some of the campaigning, and only some of it, on behalf of the European consortium could fuel protectionism and damage the commercial interests of British Aerospace and its European partners, especially in the United States.

The House and the right hon. and learned Gentleman might like to know that Sir Raymond said that the United States subsidiary of British Aerospace had expressed concern about its United States' business being halved. I also said that it was not in the national interest that the uncertainty involving Westland should drag on.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to conversations which he said took place after that meeting. I do not know of them, but I can say that others gave a

different impression of what was said or intended at the meeting, and I naturally regret that. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to know why I was concerned about the implication for Airbus sales and thought it appropriate to raise the matter, he will recall that I have already said that Sir Raymond said that the British Aerospace subsidiary had expressed concern about its business being halved. British Aerospace has a substantial stake in the A320 airbus and, as its sponsoring Minister, I am naturally concerned to protect this interest.

The House also knows that the Government are committed to advancing £250 million launch aid for that project. The recovery of all but £50 million is dependent upon the sale of the aircraft. For all those reasons, I was naturally concerned at the possibility that Airbus sales might be made more difficult, not by the participation of Sir Raymond and British Aerospace in the consortium, but by the tone of some of the things said.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked for collaboration of what I have said about the meeting with Sir Raymond. Present at the meeting were a number of civil servants, as well as my hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology. I have checked the recollection of all those present against mine, and the account that I have given to the House has been confirmed by every official present, as well as by my hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology. The disclosure of the note is not a matter for me, but I shall consider the right hon. and learned Gentleman's request.

What happens at tomorrow's meeting may be inconclusive. It would be unwise, faced with the meeting of shareholders tomorrow, for the House or for me to speculate on the many alternative possibilities that could arise. It would be wrong to attempt to do so today.

**Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley):** May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether the Government have received any letters from British Aerospace giving its views of the meeting?

**Mr. Brittan:** I have not received any such letter.

**Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil):** I wish to return from the wider issues to the matters of the affair which particularly affect my constituency. Does the Secretary of State accept that the vast majority of both the work force at Westland and the smaller shareholders back the decision of the Westland board? Will he confirm that the Anglo-Italian helicopter project, which is vital to Westland's future, is founded on an agreement between the two Governments, not on an agreement between the firms, and that Westland's position as the British Government's chosen instrument cannot be affected? Does the Secretary of State agree that future helicopter projects, which also rest on agreements between Governments, will depend on whom the British Government choose as their representative, and that neither of the two decisions before shareholders tomorrow can threaten Westland's position as the British Government's representative on future European collaborative projects?

**Mr. Brittan:** The views of the work force are well enough known, and the hon. Gentleman has said what they are. The shareholders must give such weight as they think appropriate to those views.

With regard to the Government's support for Westland, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in



[Mr. Brittan]

her letter of 1 January, the Government will give their support to Westland in Europe and elsewhere so long as the company carries on business in Britain, irrespective of which consortium takes an interest in the company.

**Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson** (New Forest): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his fair statement of events. Is he aware that for months suppliers to Westland and others have been desperately worried about the problems surrounding the company's finances, and whether they would be paid? That was even before the Ministry of Defence, the Europeans or anybody proposed anything resembling a rescue package. As Westland is not a nationalised industry, and as this is not a takeover bid, would it not be far wiser to have a moment of silence so that Sir John Cuckney, who is an able chairman, and his board can produce the best deal for the company?

**Mr. Brittan:** My hon. Friend is entirely right in saying that for some considerable time there have been anxieties about the finances of Westland. On his second point, although it is right that I should make the statement to the House, it is also right that we should be careful what we say, because there is a shareholders' meeting tomorrow and it would be wrong to apply any improper influence today.

**Mr. Merlyn Rees** (Morley and Leeds, South): Was the correcting letter from the Law Officers to the Secretary of State for Defence seen by the right hon. and learned Gentleman or his Department before it was sent to the Ministry of Defence?

**Mr. Brittan:** I saw the letter after it was sent.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): Does my right hon. and learned Friend see any potential conflict of interest in the fact that the head of the procurement executive, Mr. Peter Levene, was formerly the chairman of United Scientific Holdings? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that Mr. Levene was appointed at a salary vastly in excess of that of the chiefs of staff by the former Secretary of State for Defence, who assured the House that there would be no potential conflict? Yet United Scientific Holdings is now being blackmailed by the French Ministry of Defence, which says that an order that it could have in France will be withdrawn if the European consortium's offer is not accepted.

**Mr. Brittan:** I was not aware of that latter fact. I am sure that Mr. Levene has conducted himself with complete propriety.

**Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones** (Eccles): As the sponsoring Minister for the Westland W30 helicopter, will the Secretary of State tell us in what ways he collaborated with the former Secretary of State for Defence in establishing the European consortium?

**Mr. Brittan:** I said to Westland before the matter came between me and my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Defence that I thought it should look into the possibility of a European alternative to the United Technologies-Fiat offer which had already come forward. I therefore invited my right hon. Friend to begin that search. At a later stage—last October—at a meeting attended by, among other people, my right hon. Friend the

then Secretary of State for Defence, I indicated my strong view that the search for a European alternative should continue and go ahead.

**Mr. Jerry Wiggin** (Weston-super-Mare): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is substantial concern among the work force, because of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding this affair, that neither proposition will come to fruition? In such circumstances, does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the Government have a firm responsibility to save Westland from receivership?

**Mr. Brittan:** I very much hope that the matter will be resolved. I must make it clear that I cannot accept responsibility on behalf of the Government. As a result of the actions taken by the Government, including my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Defence, the company is faced with two alternatives, both of which are better than anything that any fair-minded person could reasonably have expected was likely to come forward several weeks ago.

**Mr. Stephen Ross** (Isle of Wight): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that Westland Aerospace, a totally owned subsidiary, is the largest industrial employer in my constituency and is therefore vital to the wellbeing of the Isle of Wight? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman know also that that company is profitable? Does he further know that most of that profit comes from the work of Boeing and de Havilland—de Havilland now being a subsidiary of Boeing? Does he know also that the work force and middle management voted overwhelmingly the other day in favour of the deal with Sikorsky—by, I think, 1,200 to seven? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that Sikorsky has behaved impeccably throughout this trauma? Does he not believe that that should be taken seriously into account by the shareholders at tomorrow's meeting?

**Mr. Brittan:** The House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's expression of views on the opinions of his constituents. On the question of Sikorsky's behaviour, I am not at the Dispatch Box to make criticisms of either side in this deal.

**Sir Peter Tapsell** (East Lindsey): In view of the important national defence interest involved, and irrespective of the bid that one might favour, how is it possible for the Government not to have a view on which bid is better for this country?

**Mr. Brittan:** One reason is that the security of supply of helicopters for the armed forces is assured. That is not, therefore, a problem. Another reason, which is of some importance, is that Westland's board has told shareholders that United Technologies has made it clear that it wishes Westland to retain its own helicopter research, design and development capability.

**Mr. Michael Foot** (Blaenau Gwent): I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the important answer that he gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). From where did the information come that misleading information had been given by the former Secretary of State for Defence, if his Department did not know about it? How did the Law Officers know that there was misleading information if they had not consulted the right hon. Gentleman's Department? Was the right hon. and learned Gentleman

surprised when the matter was "leaked", if I may use that offensive word, a few hours later? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman a party to the wishes of those hon. Members who seek an investigation into how that possible breach of the Official Secrets Act 1911 occurred?

**Mr. Brittan:** The right hon. Gentleman is well enough experienced in government to know that it is inconceivable that anyone asking such questions when his party was in power would have obtained an answer.

**Dr. Keith Hampson** (Leeds, North-West): My right hon. learned Friend said in his statement that the Government had asked that the European rescue option be fully explored. In replying to a question a few moments ago he said that he had confirmed at the 18 October meeting his strong support for pursuing the European option. Yet a few weeks ago he rebutted press speculation that he had expressed a preference for a European option. Would it not be in the interests of my right hon. and learned Friend and everyone involved in this affair if he were to make the position clear by placing in the Library the minutes that he wrote for 4 and 18 October?

**Mr. Brittan:** I think that I can make the position perfectly clear without doing that. There is all the difference in the world between wishing for an alternative to be explored and taking the view that the alternative, which at that stage had not been explored, was preferable.

**Mr. Gavin Strang** (Edinburgh, East): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that he has failed to satisfy the House about what he said to British Aerospace? Is it not clear that at that meeting he expressed a preference implicitly, and perhaps even explicitly, for the American deal? If so, was that not incompatible with Government policy as stated to the House?

**Mr. Brittan:** The account that I have given of the meeting is accurate. I do not think that to warn people of the consequences of pursuing matters in a particular way, which they had accepted, and of which they had had word from their subsidiary—I am not accusing a particular person, but certain things had been said involving anti-Americanism which were likely to damage their interests—is the same as expressing a preference for the deal.

**Mr. Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): Has my right hon. and learned Friend not been subjected to unjustified and cruel criticism? Will he confirm that on 19 December the Cabinet unanimously agreed that Ministers would not campaign for either option and that that agreement was consistently and repeatedly breached, not by my right hon. and learned Friend, but by the former Secretary of State for Defence?

**Mr. Brittan:** It is true that the Cabinet agreed that no one should campaign for either option. I understand, of course, that my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Defence strongly felt that the European option should be pursued vigorously. I imagine that some of the things that were said in the course of that led my right hon. Friend to the conclusion that he reached.

**Mr. Andrew Faulds** (Warley, East): Is not the central problem the fact that the Prime Minister always intends to have her own way, however deviously she does so, in contravention of collective decision-taking? Is not her greatest strength her unawareness of her limitations?

**Mr. Brittan:** No, Sir.

**Mr. Michael Mates** (Hampshire, East): Did my right hon. and learned Friend report the substance of his conversations last Wednesday evening with Sir Raymond Lygo to his Cabinet colleagues the following morning?

**Mr. Brittan:** No. There was no reason to do so. It was agreed at the Cabinet meeting the following morning to affirm the previous policy, which I had already expressed to the House. There was nothing at the meeting with Sir Raymond Lygo that would have led me or anyone else to wish to change that policy.

**Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth** (Stockton, South): In view of the Government's assertions of even-handedness in this matter, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman shed any light on the suggestion that there were discussions between the Prime Minister and President Reagan about the Sikorsky bid and aid for Westland Helicopters? Were there any discussions with the American Administration?

**Mr. Brittan:** I am not aware of any such discussions.

**Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): In answering my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), my right hon. and learned Friend said that he had received no such letter. In view of the importance of the conversation that is purported to have taken place, has any other member of the Government received any representations or letter from Sir Raymond Lygo or British Aerospace?

**Mr. Brittan:** I can only speak for myself.

**Mr. Jeff Rooker** (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Secretary of State address the first question that was asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)? On 16 December, why did the Secretary of State refer to the Government's decision to abandon the national armaments directors' recommendation from 13 December? In his answer, he said that the matter was relevant to 9 December. What happened on 13 December which caused him to refer to 13 December if there was no meeting of the Government on that day?

**Mr. Brittan:** The meeting on 9 December decided that if by 4 pm on 13 December there was no offer from the European consortium which the Westland board felt able to commend to its shareholders, from that moment the national armaments directors' recommendation would not continue to have any effect. The decision was taken on 9 December as to what would happen on 13 December. What had happened was announced on 16 December.

**Mr. Michael Grylls** (Surrey, North-West): As the Ministry of Defence is Westland's major customer, is it not desirable that if possible there should be a European alternative to the Sikorsky terms so that there can be competitive tenders?

**Mr. Brittan:** I see the advantage of competition. The implications of that aspect of the matter must be considered.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): In answer to the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the former Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State referred to the crucial British Aerospace letters and emphasised to the House, "I did not." He was then asked by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) if he knew whether other members of the Cabinet did, to which he replied, "I can only speak for

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

myself." Would it not be more candid for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry frankly to tell us that if he did not read them, the Prime Minister did?

**Mr. Brittan:** I have given an account of the meeting, and I have nothing further to add.

**Mr. Patrick Cormack** (Staffordshire, South): Why should the House of Commons have more confidence in my right hon. and learned Friend's judgment of the defence implications of this matter than in the judgment of our right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), bearing in mind that throughout his distinguished tenure of office he enjoyed the Prime Minister's wholehearted confidence?

**Mr. Brittan:** I am not inviting the House to do what my hon. Friend suggests I am inviting it to do.

**Mr. Martin Flannery** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): In view of the profound interest in this matter throughout the nation and Europe, and the almost unprecedented attendance here on a Monday afternoon—[Interruption.]—Tory Members may laugh, but they have something to hide. Why is the Secretary of State treating this serious subject so cavalierly, by not giving proper answers to the questions that he is being asked? Has he something to conceal? Has he read the advertisement in *The Times* this morning about the mess that British science is in? Does he realise that we are all fearful that our technology is about to disappear to the United States and that our armaments and defence industries are being sold for a mess of potage to a group of shareholders who have no interest in British working people?

**Mr. Brittan:** That is a view which the hon. Gentleman is entitled to hold. If he is worried about the interests of British working people, he will no doubt also have noted the clear view of the British working people working for Westland in Yeovil.

**Mr. Ivor Stanbrook** (Orpington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the motives of my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) have wide support in the country and in the House? If the Government are sincere about their commitment to Europe, why did they not prefer European participation from the beginning?

**Mr. Brittan:** The answer is that it was not forthcoming.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has been asked two questions about the meeting with the chairman of British Aerospace. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) asked whether the Government had received a letter from the chairman, and the Secretary of State was subsequently asked the same question again. He dodged answering it on both occasions by meekly saying that he could only speak for himself. Does he not understand that the conviction politician has dodged the column today and that he has been put in her place to answer question? Now that he has been put there, it is his job, not just to answer for himself, but to answer for the Government. That is why he is at the Dispatch Box. He should come clean.

**Mr. Brittan:** If it helps the hon. Gentleman, I am not aware of any letter from Sir Raymond Lygo to anyone else either.

**Mr. Geoffrey Dickens** (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain why the former Secretary of State for Defence places his store firmly behind the British-European option, which I support, when he had the solution for saving Westland in his own hands while he was Secretary of State for Defence? Why did he never place orders for more helicopters with Westland?

**Mr. Brittan:** The Ministry of Defence took the view, which I wish to make clear I am not in any way criticising, that it was unable to confirm a requirement for support helicopters, for which Westland had been hoping. The Ministry also declined a request from the company to place additional orders for W30 helicopters to help with its short-term problems because there was no military requirement for such helicopters. I wish to make it clear that those are the facts, and that I am not criticising the former Secretary of State for Defence for coming to those conclusions.

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): If the contents of the letter from Sir Raymond Lygo are at variance with the statement by the Secretary of State, in order to secure the fullest possible disclosure will the Secretary of State attend, and allow his officials to attend, a hearing of the Select Committee on Defence so that they may be questioned by members of the Committee?

**Mr. Brittan:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that all Select Committees of the House will be treated with the normal respect to which they are entitled.

**Mr. Robert Adley** (Christchurch): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that three years before he—my right hon. and learned Friend—came to the House I accompanied the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) to New York and Washington, at the suggestion and request of the then Minister for Aerospace and the Conservative Government, to defend the concerted attacks on Concorde project by the American aerospace industry, which was determined to kill it? In my right hon. and learned Friend's opinion, is the American aerospace industry any less determined to neuter or takeover the British aerospace industry? Does he believe that the Government are interested in protecting this country's national aerospace interest? Does he accept that a Rolls-Royce 1971 proposition for Westland is infinitely better than bankruptcy?

**Mr. Brittan:** Happily, as a result of the action taken by the Government, including my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Defence, something very much better than that now faces Westland. I was protecting British Aerospace, in its capacity as a member of the Airbus consortium, which is an example of European co-operation, from the threat to the orders which it has successfully secured in the United States, against tremendous opposition from Boeing, being jeopardised.

**Mr. D. E. Thomas** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Secretary of State comment on press reports that if Westland were to become a subsidiary of United Technologies it would become involved in strategic defence initiative work as a subcontractor, and that that

might be contrary to the memorandum signed by the former Secretary of State for Defence and his United States counterpart?

**Mr. Brittan:** I cannot comment on those press reports. I do not know of their validity.

**Mr. Robert Jackson** (Wantage): Does my right hon. and learned Friend consider that this episode has advanced or retarded the cause of European defence industrial collaboration?

**Mr. Brittan:** Neither.

**Mr. James Callaghan** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is some years since the matter arose, but it is my recollection that Ministers are entitled to refer to Government documents and those documents need not be published. However, it is my recollection that if a Minister quotes from a document, the document is then published. I believe that I heard the Secretary of State quote to the House what Sir Raymond Lygo said to him about the British Airbus. In those circumstances, I ask you to consider whether the substance of that conversation should be published.

**Mr. Speaker:** I did not hear the Secretary of State quote from a Government document.

**Mr. Brittan:** I assure the right hon. Gentleman—I know of his interest in these matters—that I did not quote from the document.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Cannock and Burntwood): Is it the case that, for the shareholders of Westland to have a choice, the recommendation of the national armaments directors had to be rejected by the Government? As a result, the work force and shareholders have a choice. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is intolerable that a private sector company has had to endure so much pressure at a time when it had found a solution to its problems and was within sight of achieving that solution, which could now be in jeopardy?

**Mr. Brittan:** The board of Westland came up with proposals which it believed would lead to a solution of the problems. It is also the case that as long as the national armaments directors' recommendation remained on the table, the Sikorsky-Fiat proposals could not go ahead.

**Several Hon. Members rose—**

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I must have regard to the fact that there is other important business to follow this statement. I shall allow questions to continue for a further five minutes, by which time we will have had a full half hour for Back-Benchers' questions.

**Mr. Callaghan:** Further to my point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is my clear recollection, because I noted it at the time, that the Secretary of State was reading the answer given by Sir Raymond Lygo. I am ready to admit that I may be wrong, but I noted the fact especially because I have had this matter in mind. I ask you to check *Hansard* carefully to ensure what happened and to give a ruling on the matter.

**Mr. Speaker:** The House heard what the Secretary of State said on that matter.

**Mr. Callaghan:** Further to that point of order—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman asked me whether I would check the record, and I shall do so.

**Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop** (Tiverton): A similar point was raised in the debate on the Second Reading of the Maplin Development Bill, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was purported to quote from a document which he declined to lay on the Table of the House, although he was pressed to do so. Perhaps the Father of the House would consider that precedent and the ruling was made on it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. We must not be distracted by Maplin today.

**Mr. Robert C. Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Further to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), is the Secretary of State aware of any letter received by Her Majesty's Government from British Aerospace? Is the Secretary of State aware that when he states from the Dispatch Box that he can only speak for himself he is seriously misleading the House? Any Minister of any rank who speaks from the Dispatch Box speaks for the Government.

**Mr. Brittan:** I have already answered that point in reply to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

**Mr. Doug Hoyle** (Warrington, North): Will the Secretary of State explain in more detail how the Government took the decision of non-intervention, in view of the defence implications of a Westland takeover? Can he say whether it was considered that Sikorsky might not be satisfied with a partial shareholding and that it might try to take over the entire company in the future?

From the explanation in the statement about the interview with the chairman of British Aerospace, when the Minister said that British Aerospace was aware of the American implications, could it appear that he was bullying the chairman of British Aerospace? Has he considered following the example of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and resigning from the Cabinet in view of the fact that he broke his undertaking of non-intervention to the House on 16 December?

**Mr. Brittan:** The answer to the latter point is no.

In taking their decision the Government took into account all questions, such as defence procurement and other matters, and took the view that the options available did not justify Government intervention.

**Mr. Dave Nellist** (Coventry, South-East): What confidence can the workers of Westland have in the job guarantees from either of the teams of big business which have been gazumping each other during recent days, especially from the team led by Lord Weinstock, who, during the past four to six weeks, has axed more than 1,000 jobs in GEC in my constituency?

If defence is the national priority which the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Prime Minister consistently state it is, why do the Government not follow the example of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) in 1971 and nationalise Westland and give guarantees to the work force that any surplus capacity will be used to make socially useful goods?

**Mr. Brittan:** The hon. Gentleman is merging defence considerations with industrial considerations. For defence, the Government must be able to ensure that helicopters are available from a secure NATO source. For industry, the Government's aim must be to further the rescue that would

[Mr. Brittan]

be in the company's best interests. The two offers would secure those objectives. I believe that the Government have not done all that badly.

**Mr. Ken Eastham** (Manchester, Blackley): The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the millions of pounds invested by the Government — which is taxpayers' money. Regardless of which company is successful, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman state whether there will be any protection of technical design in Britain? Will the Minister discuss the offset problems and the possibilities for companies such as Rolls-Royce which make helicopter engines?

**Mr. Brittan:** Rolls-Royce has expressed an interest in this matter. However, in view of the commercially sensitive position, I should not discuss that matter before tomorrow. That could appear to favour one side — [Interruption.] I hear one of my hon. Friends say, "In favour of Sikorsky", but that must be a matter for Rolls-Royce.

**Mr. John Smith:** With regard to the meeting with Sir Raymond Lygo the Secretary of State said that he had checked the recollections of colleagues and officials. Did he check a written record? Does a written record exist? It has been drawn to my attention that in a newspaper yesterday an allegation was made that during the discussion the Secretary of State indicated to officials that he did not wish that matter to be recorded. Can the Secretary of State give his reaction to that allegation? When will that record be made available to hon. Members?

As to the so-called concern about the adverse impact on British Aerospace sales, it is clear from the Secretary of State that he does not accuse Sir Raymond Lygo or British Aerospace of creating the problem. To whose statement was he referring?

**Mr. Brittan:** There is no truth in the hon. Gentleman's point about a matter not being recorded. On the point about what in the campaign led me to take that view, I can safely state, without referring to any statements, that many things were said during the course of the campaign implying that the sole interest of any United States involvement was to reduce Westland's status to low technology. Any suggestion to that effect is contrary to the expressed statement of United Technologies. It is entirely open to people to take one view or another as to which offer is to be preferred, but such allegations are completely untrue — [HON. MEMBERS: "Check the record."] I have already said that I will look into that.

## Imported Goods (Safety)

4.30 pm

**Mr. Conal Gregory** (York): 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 death and injury sustained through the sale of dangerous imported consumer goods over the Christmas period."

Christmas should be a time of happiness as we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. In too many homes this festive time has been marred by injuries received from imported goods, especially toys, and even by death. The present legislation, which does not require importers to show a duty of care that any goods have been checked on safety grounds, is clearly inadequate.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to recognise that the matter is so urgent that it should have priority over the business that has already been arranged for the House. The urgency stems from the fact that the goods which cause injury and death have not been prohibited from sale. Exporters from the far east are still shipping dangerous products to the United Kingdom and apparently not testing them against the criteria employed by the British Standards Institution. Britain cannot become the home of cheap, shoddy goods that have deadly consequences.

The debate requested is specific since it seeks to deal with dangerous imported consumer goods. New regulations are overdue, as foreshadowed in the Government's White Paper. Their absence from the statute book can be quantified in the human suffering endured in too many homes during the recess. This is the first opportunity to raise the subject in the House since Christmas. It is also an opportunity for all sides to recognise that prohibition notices and orders, together with voluntary codes of practice, have proved inadequate.

The subject is important. On 20 December, in Yorkshire, a five-month-old baby boy died as a direct consequence of playing with a dangerous imported toy. He was asphyxiated by the nylon hair on a toy pony imported from Taiwan. This was a new and tragic development since my hon. Friend the Minister responded to my Adjournment debate last year. Customs officers must have powers to seize and control dangerous imports, and trading standards officers must be given powers to protect the public. Such goods should not have the ability to maim and kill. Far too many non-United Kingdom goods, especially toys, purchased before Christmas and still being traded have potentially lethal consequences. We owe it to the nation to amend the legislation. I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will permit the time to debate this matter.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman 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 death and injury sustained through the sale of dangerous imported consumer goods over the Christmas period."

I listened with great care to what the hon. Gentleman said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.