

As the naval task force sailed for the Falklands Lord Carrington and two other Foreign Office ministers, Mr Humphrey Atkins, the Lord Privy Seal, and Mr Richard Luce, the Minister of State, resigned over Argentina's invasion. Mr Francis Pym is the new Foreign Secretary. Mr John Nott, the Defence Secretary, also offered to

resign, but Mrs Thatcher refused to accept. The Prime Minister last night exclaimed: "Failure? The possibilities do not exist". Her words emphasized the Government's determination to recover the Falklands. Seven Royal Marines, who had been holding out in the islands since the attack, have been captured, according to Argentina.

# Nott offer to quit rejected by Mrs Thatcher

By Julian Haviland, Political Editor

The Government and the Conservative Party were shaken by the resignation of Lord Carrington as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, because of what Lord Carrington described as the "humiliating affront to this country" occasioned by the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands. Mr Francis Pym was appointed to succeed him.

With Lord Carrington went two members of his ministerial team. Mr Humphrey Atkins, Lord Privy Seal and Deputy Foreign Secretary, and Mr Richard Luce, Minister of State.

The Prime Minister, who accepted Lord Carrington's departure with the greatest reluctance after trying for two days to dissuade him, responded by once again committing the Government in uncompromising language to returning the Falklands to sovereignty. Asked on Independent Television news whether she would resign if she failed, Mrs Margaret Thatcher adapted the words of Queen Victoria and explained: "Failure? The possibilities do not exist".

Mr John Nott also offered to resign as Secretary of State for Defence but his offer was firmly refused by Mrs Thatcher. Thanking him, she assured him that his department was not responsible for policy towards the Falklands. It was vital that he continue in office during preparations for possible armed action, she said.

The consequences of Lord Carrington's departure, though accepted by Government supporters as inevitable and honourable, were last night being calculated with increasing anxiety by Conservative MPs. They were appalled at the loss of so senior and capable a minister who was regarded even by his critics as a steadying influence in the Cabinet.

What was worse, as the day wore on, Government ministers and backbenchers grew more fearful that even sacrifice of half the Foreign Office team might prove too small to appease the Opposition or to unite the country, as Lord Carrington had hoped to do.

There is wide agreement among Conservatives that the choice of Mr Pym as Foreign Secretary was right. Mr John Biffen succeeds Mr Pym as Lord President of the Council and leader of the Commons, leaving his former post of Secretary of State for Trade to be filled. With the Foreign Secretary now in the Commons, Mr Atkins may not be replaced.

The exchange of letters reveals that Lord Carrington first proposed to resign on Saturday and that Mrs Thatcher did all she could to dissuade him. The fact that the announcement was made yesterday from the Foreign Office and not from Downing Street suggests that in the end he had to insist, taking his stand on the classic principle of ministerial accountability.

The invasion had led to strong criticism of Government policy, he wrote. Much of this was unfounded, but he was responsible for the conduct of the policy and it was right that he should resign.

Lord Carrington said that the Prime Minister's pledge to do everything possible to uphold the Falkland Islanders' rights deserved the unqualified support of Parliament and the country; and that his would be more easily maintained if the Foreign Office was entrusted to no one else.

In reply, the Prime Minister accepted his "unalterable decision" with the greatest reluctance. He had given the nation most outstanding service, and she instanced as his greatest single achievement, the settlement in Zimbabwe.

The departure of the Foreign Office ministers is the biggest mass resignation since Mr Peter Thorneycroft resigned with two subordinates — Mr Enoch Powell and Mr Nigel Birch — from the Treasury under Mr Harold Macmillan in 1958. But it was far from clear last night whether the short-term effect has been to strengthen the Government's position.

But there are divisions within the Labour Party as to how far it should go in supporting the use of force. At a meeting of the Tribune Group of left-wing MPs last night, Mr Wedgwood Benn said Britain should not support a war against Argentina.

Mr Benn was in a minority at the meeting.

Mr Michael Foot, speaking in London last night, said the Government having failed to discharge its responsibilities everything must be done to repair the damage. If the dictators of Argentina or anywhere else got into their heads that whenever they wanted to grab someone's else's territory they could do it with impunity the world would be more dangerous.



Mr Pym: takes over as Foreign Secretary.