

Pym affirms faith in EEC

Time 27 MAY 1982 Hugh Noyes, Parliamentary Correspondent

Reaffirming the basic faith of Britain in a successful future for the European Community, Mr Francis Pym told the Commons yesterday that membership was one of the central features of British foreign policy and would remain so.

The Foreign Secretary was opening the debate in the European Community in connexion with the breeching of the "Luxembourg compromise" by our EEC partners to enable the agricultural price package to be carried by majority vote against the wishes of London. That, he said, was an example of the Community working at its worst and there was no doubt that the vote of the Agriculture Council on May 18 was a major departure from the way EEC business had customarily been conducted.

It was a departure which would have the most serious implications for the future if EEC countries were not able to establish clear procedures as an essential basis for confidence between member states.

Mr Pym said he had told our partners that we took the gravest view of what had happened and that there could not be confusion about the way decisions were to be taken. He hoped that at the June meeting an absolutely clear understanding would be reached for the future.

The Foreign Secretary went on to make clear to the House that he was also less than enamoured with the settlement on Britain's contribution to the EEC budget.

It was evident from his words that Whitehall had backed down from its earlier demands because of the dangers of repercussions relating to the Falklands crisis.

There was a real danger, Mr Pym, said, that we and our partners would become ever more deeply ensenced in irreconcilable positions and would talk ourselves into a crisis that should be avoided if possible. He told the House that such a crisis at this time might have done considerable damage to the cohesion of the Community and to Britain's own long-term interests within it.

With Mr Eric Heffer, opening for Labour from the Opposition front bench, claiming that Mr Pym had put the best possible gloss on what had happened in the EEC, the Foreign Secretary said he made no secret of the fact that the new settlement was less good than the Government would have wished, both as to duration and amount.

He believed, however, that it was an acceptable settlement for 1982, bearing in mind that we had fared better

than expected for the earlier years.

It would require a great effort, he said, to secure a satisfactory solution for 1983 and later years but Mr Pym gave an assurance that the Government would pursue these negotiations vigorously.

He added that Britain had accepted a basic refund of £490m which would make the net contribution, after refunds, of £390m. The Government had wanted a refund of £580m.

Mr Heffer complained that it was clear that the Government was nowhere near getting the permanent settlement desired by the Government on the terms of Britain's contribution to the European budget.

On the Falklands, however, Mr Pym was loud in praise of our Community partners. The support we had received from them was extremely welcome, he told the House. Their action immediately after the Argentine was exemplary and they gave this country the fullest support at political level, and with unprecedented speed and unanimity.

He believed that the action of the Community, of our Commonwealth partners, of Norway and of the United States, was without precedent in an international dispute of this kind.