

Icelandic Rejection of German Invitation to Tripartite Conference. - Further Anglo- Icelandic Exploratory Talks.

Following talks in Bonn between British and West German officials on Sept. 13, the German Federal Government on Sept. 16 invited Iceland and Britain to tripartite talks in the West German capital on Sept. 28–29. Iceland, however, rejected the invitation. Notes were handed by Hr. Agustsson on Sept. 19 to Mr. McKenzie and Herr Karl Rowold (the West German Ambassador) saying that the Icelandic Government was not willing to participate in multilateral talks, although she was ready to hold separate talks with each country.

The Icelandic Notes also said that the dates of Sept. 28–29 would not be convenient "for special reasons", as Hr. Agustsson expected to be in New York for the U.N. General Assembly session. The Note to Britain recalled that no reply had as yet been received to the Icelandic Note of Aug. 11.

At a meeting in New York on Sept. 28 during the U.N. General Assembly session, Sir Alec Douglas-Home and Hr. Agustsson agreed that British and Icelandic officials should meet in Reykjavik to resume attempts to avert a "cod war" over fishing rights. Discussions accordingly started on Oct. 5, it being agreed by Hr. Jóhannesson and Mr. Curtis Keeble, Assistant Under-Secretary at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and leader of the British delegation, that they would not be called negotiations but "informal exploratory talks"; the leader of the Icelandic delegation was Hr. Hans Andersen, whilst the British delegation included Mr. Charles Hudson, president of the British Trawlers' Federation, as adviser.

The talks ended on Oct. 7, a joint statement saying that officials would report to their Governments and that further discussions would be arranged "at the appropriate time". While the British side expressed a more hopeful view, Hr. Jóseppsson declared on Oct. 9 that the talks between the two countries had achieved "little or no result" and that insufficient progress had been made to warrant further talks.

After a lull of over a month, Icelandic gunboats resumed on Oct. 16 their harassing tactics against some 70 British trawlers fishing in the disputed areas.

In particular, the *Wyre Corsair* had its warps cut on Oct. 17 and on the same day blank shots were fired across the bows of the *Wyre Vanguard*, which was sailing with her nets stowed and which had refused an order to stop. On Oct. 18 a collision occurred between the *Aegir* and the *Aldershot*, which had similarly refused to stop and whose warps were about to be cut.

Further strong British representations were made both to Hr. Agustsson in Reykjavik and to Hr. Sigurdsson in London. Mr. Anthony Boyle, who had expressed to the Icelandic Ambassador the British Government's "sense of outrage" at the incidents, made a statement in the House of

Commons on Oct. 19 on "the very regrettable and serious deterioration in the situation concerning our fishing vessels operating in the waters around Iceland".

Mr. Royle said: "As a result of discussions held between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Icelandic Foreign Minister in New York on Sept. 28, we have been able to clarify the positions of the two sides on a possible interim arrangement. There is indeed a wide gap between us but we feel on the British side that it is still worthwhile holding further discussions in an attempt to bridge the gap. We informed the Icelandic Government accordingly on Oct. 11.

" On Oct. 16, before any reply had been received, Icelandic gunboats embarked on a course of systematic interference with British vessels. In one case they have fired warning shots and in one case a gunboat attempting to cut the trawl wires of a British vessel collided with it, tearing a hole in the side of the trawler and endangering the lives of the crew. We shall be claiming compensation.

" I summoned the Icelandic Ambassador yesterday and formally protested at the Icelandic Government's action. I expressed to him the Government's sense of outrage, and that of parliamentary and public opinion, at this resumption of Icelandic harassment. I made it clear that we reserve the right in the event of further interference to take without further notice such measures as we may consider appropriate to protect our vessels. H.M. Ambassador in Reykjavik has spoken in similar terms to the Icelandic Foreign Minister.

" We still believe that it is in the interest at both Governments that discussions should continue and we have had the full support throughout of the trawler owners, skippers and crews in this. But I must make it plain that British vessels must be free from harassment.

" I would emphasize that throughout this unhappy dispute we have, for our part, acted entirely in accordance with international law and we shall continue to do so."

After referring to the International Court's interim order, Mr. Boyle declared: "The British Government and the British industry have behaved with great restraint during this dispute.... There is, I believe, still the opportunity for an early and amicable negotiated arrangement which will be satisfactory to both parties, pending a definitive settlement. I must warn the Icelandic Government that we expect them to show the same restraint."

Mr. Crosland (Lab.), M.P. for Grimsby, welcomed Mr. Royle's statement and endorsed both its "tone and its content". "Feeling in the fishing ports and amongst trawlermen at the moment," Mr. Crosland declared, "is at boiling point. We are on the brink of a confrontation of force in which lives will certainly be lost.... The Government have rightly shown that they are determined to do all they can to withdraw from the brink. It is now up to the Icelandic Government to show that they want to do the same."

Mr. Royle said in reply: "I must tell the House that naval forces are close at hand. I am sure that the House will accept that operational instructions must be kept confidential.... We are prepared to order the Royal Navy to go to the aid of our trawlers if necessary. The Government and

industry hope that while there are prospects for further negotiations... it will not be necessary to use this force in defence of our shipping, and again I call on the Icelandic Government to match our restraint and sanity."

Replying to **Mr. James Johnson** (Lab.), M.P. for Kingston-upon-Hull West, who had likewise expressed satisfaction at the Minister's "sterling words", **Mr. Royle** said: "I think that I have made the Government's attitude quite clear. In fact, since Sept. 1 we have provided two civilian support vessels continuously on station.... The support vessel *Othello* was on hand to help in the most recent incidents."

Mr. Patrick Wall (C.), M.P. for Haltemprice, said: "Many people believe that the escalation of these incidents is due to Communist pressure designed to get Iceland out of NATO and... therefore any settlement would be very advantageous not only to Britain and Iceland but to the West as a whole." In reply to questions by Mr. Wall, **Mr. Royle** stated that H.M. Government were coordinating action with the West German Government and were in close touch with them. Saying that he welcomed a statement by the Icelandic Prime Minister on Oct. 18 in the *Althing* that Iceland wished to continue negotiations as long as there was the chance of "an honourable settlement", Mr. Royle added: "There is no link between the fisheries dispute with Britain and Icelandic membership of NATO. The fact that we are allies as well as friends makes it all the more important that we should settle our differences amicably...."

The trawling industry's joint action committee, having met in Hull on Oct. 20 to discuss the worsening "cod war" situation, called on Mr. Prior in London on Oct. 23 to ask for an immediate Navy presence among the trawling fleet off Iceland, an agreed statement saying that "they feared that further incidents involving British trawlers would lead to loss of life or injury unless the Royal Navy was present to act in a police role". Mr. Prior told the deputation that two Royal Navy frigates, H.M.S. *Achilles* and H.M.S. *Phoebe*, were now stationed in the Iceland region just outside the 50-mile limit, ready to go to the aid of British trawlers harassed by Icelandic gunboats; he undertook to report the committee's views on the need for an immediate Navy presence to the Government and "consider urgently with them what further steps were necessary".

A meeting of the defence and overseas policy committee of the British Cabinet took place under Mr. Heath's chairmanship at 10 Downing Street on Oct. 24 to discuss *inter alia* the U.K.'s reaction to the increasingly dangerous situation in the dispute with Iceland. On the same day the Icelandic Foreign Ministry stated that there was "no foundation" for further talks until Britain was ready to discuss limiting the number, size and type of ships which would be permitted to fish inside the 50-mile limit under any new arrangement. A Foreign Office spokesman in London said in reply on Oct. 25 that restrictions on the number, size and type of vessels were a subject which had been discussed during previous rounds of negotiations and "there is no reason why this subject should not be discussed again".

Authoritative press comment in London stated that clearly at this stage the British Government was determined to avoid if possible any escalation of the "cod war", and in particular was most reluctant to instruct the frigates *Achilles* and *Phoebe* to give "positive" support to trawlers inside the 50-mile belt unless this became essential.

Mr. McKenzie on the same day (Oct. 25), called upon Hr. Johannesson to hand him a message from Mr. Heath; following the receipt of Hr. Jóhannesson's reply it was announced in London and Reykjavik on Oct. 31 that the two countries had agreed to resume talks at ministerial level.

As a reaction to the Icelandic measures against British trawlers, the U.K. Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) announced on Oct. 21 that it was imposing a ban on landings in Britain of all Icelandic fish and other goods by Icelandic vessels.

Mr. Dave Shenton, national fisheries officer for the TGWU, said in Hull on Oct. 22 that there had been "such an upsurge from the fishermen... and reaction from the dockers that we have reluctantly decided to enforce a landing ban "-an Icelandic ship with a cargo of frozen fish fillets having been "blackened" the previous day at Grimsby and directed to a German port, while another one was subsequently blacked on Oct. 25 at Felixstowe.

A similar ban had been imposed by the British trade unions in 1952 during the previous fishery limits dispute[see 1252133 2760A;15251A], resulting in Iceland turning to the Soviet Union, which opened her markets to Icelandic fish and in return obtained a monopoly position for her exports of oil to Iceland.

In the period January-August 1972 Iceland was stated to have exported goods worth £6,600,000 to the U.K., including £1,900,000 of fish and £2,500,000 of manufactured goods. British exports to Iceland during this period were given as £8,700,000, the biggest item being £3,200,600 for machinery and transport equipment. Annual figures for Icelandic imports from the U.K. were then shown as £11,600,000.

Hr. Jóseppson claimed on Oct. 24 that the British dockets' ban Would not have "the slightest effect on our trade situation", adding: "We can easily sell our fish in other countries, and the goods we have bought in England—mainly cars, all kinds of machines, and textiles—are easily available on the same or better terms in other countries."

Hr. Magnús Kjartansson, the Icelandic Minister of Industries, in a letter on Oct. 25 to the Icelandic Federation of Industry called on all Icelandic importers to impose an immediate ban on British goods, describing the blacking of cargoes from Iceland by British dockers as "an unfriendly act that cannot be ignored". Hr. Jóseppson stated on Oct. 27 that the Icelandic Government would help importers who switched their trade with Britain to other countries, and promised support to Icelandic manufacturers affected by the British union's ban.

Earlier, Hr. Hannibal Valdimarsson, the Minister of Communications, had on Oct. 20 called on all Icelandic port authorities not to give aid to British or West German ships supporting foreign trawlers fishing inside Iceland's 50-mile limit, while the Icelandic Federation of Labour had urged member-unions to boycott British trawlers fishing within the limit, as well as their support vessels.

Meanwhile the onset of the winter storms around Iceland had made the situation more difficult for British trawlers, which were seeking shelter close inshore because of severe weather conditions.

Another British trawler (*Real Madrid*) had blank shots fired across her bows on Oct. 29 after refusing to accept an Icelandic boarding party, while on Nov. 23 further harassment took place, the *Via Nova* had her wires cut, and the *Odinn* gave a warning that any attempts to ram the gunboat or otherwise interfere with her activities would be met by gunfire. Immediate British protests were made to the Icelandic Foreign Ministry and to the Embassy in London. The Icelandic Embassy on its part alleged that, according to complaints received by the Coastguard, British trawlers were destroying the fishing gear of Icelandic boats and behaving "very aggressively", it being asserted that iron bolts and other missiles had been thrown at the crew of an Icelandic vessel until the *Odinn* came to the latter's assistance.

Despite the incident of Nov. 23, a British delegation led by Lady Tweedsmuir and including also Mr. Anthony Stodart (Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), Mr. Charles Hudson and Mr. Dave Shenton, arrived in Reykjavik on Nov. 26. The talks opened on Nov. 27 but broke down the following day, a joint communique stating: "Problems involved were thoroughly discussed but no solution was found. It was agreed that both delegations would give further consideration to the various proposals advanced and would keep in touch with a view to possible future discussions."

The deadlock arose over the "box" system which it had been hoped would allow British trawlers to fish within the 50-mile limit in various large areas at different seasons, thus conserving cod stocks, but no agreement could be reached on details of such a scheme.

Details of the abortive discussions were given by Sir Alec Douglas-Home in the U.K. House of Commons on Nov. 30.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home said that Britain's policy was based on the international Court's interim order "under which Iceland is not to enforce her regulations against British vessels outside the 12-mile limit and we should reduce our catch to a maximum of 170,000 tons a year". "However," he went on, "in order to reach an interim agreement we did not insist on catching 170,000 tons and we were prepared to consider any reasonable method of limitation. The proposal which, with the support of the British fishing industry, Lady Tweedsmuir put to the Icelandic Government was based on a report made by British and Icelandic officials in October. This suggested a negotiating bracket between 17 per cent and 25 per cent below the British catch of 1971.

" We suggested that one-third of the waters round Iceland should be closed to British vessels at any one time. We also accepted Icelandic conservation areas and recognized that there might be a need for special arrangements for areas containing fixed gear. Our industry was also prepared to give an assurance on the future composition or tonnage of the fishing fleet, We offered to negotiate on the midpoint of the bracket proposed by officials—namely, a catch of 163,000 tons—about 21 per cent below the 1971 figure.

" The Icelandic Government proposed that half the area should be closed at one time. They also wanted further extensive areas to be reserved for the smaller Icelandic vessels and pressed for the exclusion of all our freezers, as well as trawlers over 180 ft. in length or 750 to 800 tons in size. This would have excluded our most modern vessels and constituted a damaging precedent. We

estimated that the total effect of these restrictions would be to cut our catch by at least 60 to 70 per cent.

" In an attempt to bridge the gap, we suggested a different approach In the form of a 10 per cent reduction in the actual fishing effort—the number of days' fishing—by British vessels in the disputed waters. We estimated that this would have resulted in a 25 per cent reduction in the catch, giving us perhaps 158,000 tons, compared with 208,000 tons in 1971. However, the Icelandic Government was not prepared to accept this suggestion as a basis for further negotiation and suggested no alternative.

" Lady Tweedsmuir offered to extend her stay but the Icelandic Government did not consider we could take matters further at this stage. I hope, however, that when they have considered our latest proposals further they will recognize that they meet their twin requirements of conservation and coastal State preference. This method would still preserve the livelihood of our own fishermen.

" For our part we are ready to resume negotiations at any time. Meanwhile we will continue the proceedings before the International Court. We continue to keep in touch with the German Federal Government throughout these negotiations."

Mr. Crosland, who described the Icelandic proposals as "preposterous", asked(1)whether Lady Tweedsmuir had "the slightest indication... that the Icelandic Government had any serious intention of continuing the negotiations during the winter"; (2)whether, in view of the fact that British trawlermen were fishing in the grounds "with the full backing of international law and the International Court of Justice", the Government would "strengthen as necessary the naval presence in the area, particularly to avoid incidents of harassment": whether it would be made clear to the Icelandic Government that, if British trawlermen's lives were lost "due to the closure of Iceland ports and fjords to British trawlers", the responsibility "will be that of the Icelandic Government... alone"; what was meant by newspaper reports about actions of the West German Government.

Sir Alec replied: "Lady Tweedsmuir deliberately kept open the possibility of more negotiations because everybody realizes how serious would be the consequences of a 'cod war' on the industry. I shall have the opportunity at the NATO Council meeting next week to see the Foreign Minister of Iceland, and I shall take advantage of it... The Minister of State returned with very little hope that the discussions could be resumed in a meaningful way....

"Naval ships will be on station as required. The responsibility for any loss of life or damage is of the Icelandic Government.... We have kept in touch with the German Federal Government all the time in the negotiations."

Mr. Wall asked Sir Alec to confirm that each time the two Governments had met Britain had had to make concessions, and that "we have no more to give[and] have gone as far as we can". He asked for a clear statement "that if there is any more harassment of British trawlers on the high seas the Royal Navy will move in to protect them" and that this protection would be co-ordinated with the West Germans.

Sir Alec replied: "I do not see how we could make any more concessions... [ti is]important that we should reach a settlement if at all possible because the alternative of a 'cod war' is terrible. I have made it plain to the Icelandic Government that the Royal Navy must protect our fishermen if they are interfered with." Answering Mr. James Johnson, Sir Alec repeated: "We have a legal right to fish up to 12 miles.... Where we have a right to fish we must protect our fishermen if there is any interference."

When **Mr. Laurance Reed** (C.) said that there was "a large body of opinion in the world which supports the view that the Continental Shelf and the waters overlying it should be treated as a single organic unit, precisely because oil has been discovered in it", **Sir Alec** declared: "If we are to have any alteration in the law of the sea in relation to the Continental Shelf it ought to be done at the Law of the Sea conference in 1973, and not by unilateral action on the part of any country."

In the House of Lords the statement was repeated by Lady Tweedsmuir, who had already given a detailed account of the differing negotiating positions after the breakdown of the talks in Reykjavik on Nov. 28.

As forecast by Sir Alec Douglas-Home in his statement to the House of Commons, he and Hr. Īgústsson had two private meetings on Dec. 6 and 7 during the North Atlantic Council session in Brussels to discuss possibilities of finding a basis for an interim agreement; British sources said afterwards that no new proposals had emerged but that the Ministers had agreed to remain in touch through diplomatic channels. A further inconclusive attempt to reach an agreement was made at a meeting at the Foreign Office between Lady Tweedsmuir and Hr. Sigurdsson on Jan. 4, 1973, the day before the continuation of proceedings before the International Court of Justice[see below].

Following the failure of the Reykjavik talks it was agreed on Dec. 6, at a meeting in London between Mr. Godber (who had meanwhile succeeded Mr. Prior as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) and the representatives of the deep sea fishing industry, that British trawlers would, as from Dec. 18, abandon the rich plaice-fishing grounds off the northwest coast of Iceland and concentrate activities off the east coast.

Mr. Austen Laing, director-general of the British Trawlers' Federation, explained that the decision had been taken for three main reasons: (a) safety, as the north-west grounds were particularly exposed to storms, especially in January and February; (b) risk of arrest—whereas in the past the trawlermen had been able to seek shelter from bad weather in Icelandic ports, they would now face arrest if they did so; (c) protection—if the situation in the "cod war" deteriorated to such an extent that Royal Navy ships were called in, protection would be easier with all the British ships in one area.

Mr. Hudsn, president of the Federation, said that they did not want any escalation of the Navy presence and considered that naval tactics which had been put into operation were "sufficient warning to the Icelandic Government that the Navy is not very far away".

In London, a Ministry of Defence spokesman had said on Dec. 3 that the naval standing patrol on station between the Faroes and Iceland had been doubled and that the frigate H.M.S. *Danae* had been joined by the anti-aircraft frigate H.M.S. *Jaguar*.

As far as West German trawlers were concerned, during the initial months after the Icelandic extension of the fisheries limit there had been no harassment by Icelandic gunboats. This was attributed in the Press partly to the fact that German trawlers were principally interested in catching redfish, especially salmon, rather than cod—which Iceland claimed had been over-fished and wanted to reserve for her own fishermen—and partly to the fact that the German trawlers had at first kept largely to the outer parts of the extended 50-mile fishery zone.

The first incident involving German trawlers, however, occurred on Nov. 25, a number of them having been spotted on the previous day fishing well inside the 50-mile limit and ordered to leave. When two of the trawlers (Arcturus and Erlangen) were still found fishing in the area on Nov. 25 their trawl cables were cut by Aegir and a crew-member was severely injured when a loose end of a cable lashed back on the deck.

A strong German protest was made on Nov. 27 to both the Icelandic Foreign Ministry and the Icelandic Ambassador in Bonn, and the Federal Foreign Ministry stated that it would inform the International Court of the Icelandic attack.

Herr Rudiger von Wechmar, the West German deputy Government spokesman, told a press conference on Nov. 29 that the Cabinet had decided to raise the whole question of the dispute in the Political Committee of the EEC, adding: "I don't have to tell you what that means."

[Under the terms of the protocol attached to Iceland's trade agreement with the Community signed on July 22, 1972—A— 25446; substantial tariff concessions granted by the EEC on Icelandic exports of fish products from April 1, 1973, were made subject to the achievement of a satisfactory solution to the fishing limits dispute with present and future Community members—i.e. Belgium, Western Germany, Britain and Denmark. Fish products represent more than 80 per cent of Iceland's exports to the Community

Two incidents occurred towards the end of December 1972, the situation becoming still more serious and incidents more frequent during the first three weeks of January 1973.

These incidents comprised principally the cutting of the British trawler *Benella's* wires on Dec. 27; a minor collision between the British *Brucella* and the *Odinn* on Dec. 28, described by the Coastguard as "intentional ramming" by the trawler; the cutting of the West German factory trawler *Berlin's* wires on Jan. 6, 1973, and of those of two British trawlers (*Boston Blenheim* and *Westalla*) on Jan. 7; Icelandic Coastguard claims on Jan. 8 that British and West German support ships—the *Othello* and *Meerkatze* respectively—had "illegally" intervened to protect trawlers fishing within the 50-mile limit against police action by Icelandic gunboats; and further cutting of trawl wires of British trawlers on Jan. 10, 17 and 23 (*Ross Renown*, *Vanessa* and *Luneda*, and *Ross Altair* respectively) and of a West German trawler (*Sirius*) on Jan. 21.

During this period a number of protests were made by the British authorities, who moreover reserved a demand for compensation for the loss in a number of cases of costly trawling equipment. In turn, the Icelandic Government complained of "aggressive tactics" by British trawlers, of continued fishing within the 50-mile limit, and of obstruction by British and West German support vessels.

The skippers of about 100 trawlers from Grimsby, Hull and Fleetwood threatened in a radio telegram on Jan. 18 to withdraw from Icelandic waters unless the British Navy moved in. "Unless we hear something of naval protection within 24 hours," they said, "we are all leaving Iceland. We do not mind fishing in boxes so long as we can keep our gear on the bottom." Ten trawlers were reported to have left for the Faroes on the following day because of the earlier harassment by Icelandic gunboats.

Earlier on Jan. 18 naval experts, trawler owners and skippers had met in London at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food following a meeting of leaders of the industry and the trade unions with Mr. Godber, the Minister. Both Mr. Godber and the industry expressed "deep concern" at the increasing harassment, and it was agreed that the two sides would meet in Hull on Jan. 22 with more naval experts and some of the skippers who had actually been affected by the cutting of their trawl wires.

On Jan. 19, the trawlermen in London met Ministry of Defence officials, who stressed that direct naval intervention was not desirable at that stage. "The British Government," a Defence Ministry statement said, "remains ready to instruct the Royal Navy to intervene if this should seem appropriate, but in any decision the Government will continue to have regard for the wishes of the fishing industry as a whole."

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced also on Jan. 19 that the fast ocean-going tug *Statesman* had been ordered to Icelandic waters to help British trawlers defend themselves against wire-cutting and "other aggressive tactics".

The *Statesman*, registered in Liberia but hired by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on charter from the United Trading Company and based at Leith, was to be used as a civilian support ship. Mr. Godber stated that she would not carry a gun and had orders to supplement the purely defensive measures which trawlers were taking themselves.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pointed out that the other support vessels on station off Iceland would continue to offer the usual range of services—weather forecasting, technical assistance and medical care—while two Royal Navy frigates were still stationed outside Iceland's disputed 50-mile limit. The *Statesman* sailed from Leith on Jan. 20, and three days later went into action for the first time.

In the House of Commons on Jan. 22, Sir Alec Douglas-Home made a statement in which he gave details of further negotiations which had been going on with Iceland during December and January, disclosed the nature of the latest Icelandic Note (of Jan. 19), and reiterated the basis of Britain's policy in the matter.

Sir Alec said: "The House will recall that... on Nov. 27 and 28 we suggested to the Icelandic Government that an interim settlement to our dispute about fisheries Jurisdiction might be based on the reduction of the actual fishing effort by British vessels in the disputed waters.

" When I saw the Icelandic Foreign Minister at the North Atlantic Council on Dec. 6 and 8, he said we had been talking to a total catch reduction in the order of 25 per cent and asked me if I could let him have a combination of effort limitation and area limitation having that effect.

" After consultations I provided him with a proposal, the effort limitation part of which would have in itself provided a 25 per cent reduction on the 1971 level of catch, combined with restrictions on areas from which we normally take some 9 per cent of our catch.

" I said that if the Icelandic Government were prepared to conclude an interim arrangement on this basis we would still be prepared to incorporate in any agreement our willingness not to fish in the proposed Icelandic non-discriminatory conservation areas and, on a seasonal basis, small areas where there were concentrations of fixed gear.

" I had had no reply to these proposals when harassment of our trawlers was resumed. On Dec. 29 I sent the Icelandic Foreign Minister a message reminding him of the serious view we took of such interference with our vessels. I said I hoped he would shortly be able to let us have a date for the resumption of negotiations and that there would meanwhile be no further harassment.

" I regret to tell the House that the situation on the fishing grounds continued to deteriorate. Finally, on Jan. 19, six weeks after I had responded to Hr. Agustsson's request for effort limitation proposals, H.M. Ambassador in Reykjavik was informed that the proposals had been discussed by the Icelandic Government, which concluded that they were not acceptable and that a resumption of negotiations would not therefore be helpful, although the Icelandic Government would be ready to discuss new proposals. This message was accompanied by a memorandum restating the earlier Icelandic proposals....

" I instructed H.M. Ambassador in Reykjavik to see the Icelandic Foreign Minister and record my surprise that an offer which corresponded exactly with the request that he had himself put forward should have received this response. H.M. Ambassador carried out these instructions this morning. In doing so he set out once more our view of the attempts which the Icelandic Government have made to secure their objectives by the use of force in defiance of an interim order by the International Court of Justice and the responsibility which they bear for the dangerous situation which exists on the fishing grounds.

" At the same time we recognize that there is room for doubt about the precise effect of either the British or Icelandic proposals, and in view of the Icelandic Government's expressed readiness to consider new proposals I have suggested that discussions be resumed at an early date with the task of devising an arrangement which could reasonably be expected to leave us with 75 per cent of our 1971 catch. I made it clear that our efforts to solve the dispute by the due process of law before the International Court of Justice would continue.

" After consultations with the industry the Government have provided increased civilian support to our trawlermen and are ready to implement further measures if necessary. I should like to take this occasion to pay tribute to the exemplary behaviour of the commanders of our support vessels and of the skippers, officers and crews of British trawlers operating in extremely trying conditions. We will persevere in getting them a fair deal."

Mr. Crosland " warmly endorsed " Sir Alec's tribute to the skippers and crews of British trawlers, whole conditions, he said, were "extremely dangerous" and "now nearly intolerable". The sending of the *Statesman*, Mr. Crosland added, had aroused "some scepticism in the fishing ports": though he himself was prepared to reserve judgment, he asked whether it was not "a curious and undignified feature" that the *Statesman*, which was intended to protect British trawlers, was under Liberian registration.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home replied: "Our first task is to protect our fishing boats from harassment. I believe the best way to do so—as of today because the situation may change tomorrow—is to send the support ship *Statesman*. It is registered under the Liberian flag, but it is chartered by a company in this country, and we are acting in this strictly in accordance with the International rules of seamanship. This vessel was the only one which we had available at short notice. It can be replaced, but if necessary the Navy will have to intervene. I believe this come of action to be the best at present, however.

" We have unequivocally condemned the Icelandic Government's behaviour. They have refused to take part in the proceedings of the International Court; they are trying to achieve their object by force. I find it hard to believe that a responsible Western European Government and a NATO ally should behave in this way."

In answer to a question by **Mr. Grimond (L.)**, **Sir Alec** said: "There are British naval vessels capable of doing the job, but once we begin to use the Navy for protection... that is the beginning of a 'cod war'... The vessel, which is under the Liberian flag, is chartered; but it is chartered, controlled, crewed and captained by Britons. The task of [statesman] is to interpose itself between the Icelandic gunboats and the British vessels and to protect them as best it can. It is very well suited for this task, according to the information we have. If necessary the Navy will have to be used."

Replying to Sir Alec's statement, Hr. Īgústsson reiterated on Jan. 30 that there was no chance of resuming talks unless Britain offered "new and better proposals", without which, he said, "the gulf between the viewpoints of the Icelandic and British Governments is too wide for a meeting to be of use".

No further incidents occurred during the six weeks after Jan. 23 owing to the Icelandic gunboats being employed on rescue and salvage work in connexion with a volcanic eruption which started on that date in the Westman Islands[this will be described in a subsequent article].