

Third Session with Councillors: Saturday, 29 November, 10.00-11.15

The participants were the as in Sessions I and II, except that Mr Monk and Mr Luxton were absent.

1. The Governor opened the meeting by saying that the next meeting of the Joint Councils would be on 6 January.
2. Mr Ridley described his visit to the Camp settlements. He had had meetings in seven settlements, attended by practically all the residents of each. People seemed well acquainted with the three proposals as explained on the radio. Station Managers seemed strongly in favour of some form of settlement. In each place there had of course been a vocal minority opposed but he thought the general opinion had been in favour of opening negotiations to see what could be achieved, while reserving final judgement for a general election or referendum after negotiations were completed. There was a general acceptance that something needed to be done; but people looked first for the solution which was not available, i.e. that the problem should simply go away. There had been a remarkable readiness to discuss the issues and consider the realities; there appeared to be less emotion in the Camp than in Port Stanley. Mr Ridley thought that Councillors should travel round the Islands and talk as much as possible; the questions he had posed needed unbiased and serious consideration. Mr Fearn read out the terms of a letter which had been addressed to the Governor from a settlement at Port San Carlos, which said that Mr Ridley ought to be authorised to explore leaseback in negotiations.
3. Mr Wallace said that the general reaction in Port Stanley had been different. There had been initial shock; the commercial section seemed in favour of a leaseback (because they were thinking of profits), but the majority were giving quiet consideration to the ideas. The vocal group was only a minority. He believed that the majority of the population would inform Councillors of their views without hysteria. Nevertheless, people were aware that they were being asked to give approval in principle to the idea of leaseback; if at this stage they agreed that negotiations should be held on that basis, the referendum or election which would follow the conclusion of negotiations would concern only the details, not the basic principle which had to be agreed to now. Mr Ridley on this latter point, agreed that a commitment

to negotiate on the basis of lease-back or freeze had to involve a tacit acceptance of the principles behind those proposals; but he reminded Councillors that Islanders would have a second chance to decide the question, at the end of negotiations.

4. Mr Goss said that the managers of West Falkland were very different from the farm workers. In his view, there was strong feeling against lease-back, but people wanted more time to think. Some who had spoken to him wanted nothing to do with any of Mr Ridley's ideas, saying that they were prepared to take the consequences. The Islands were not dependent on Argentina for supplies; ninety per cent came from Britain. But the whole question needed thought and time. Personally if he had to choose between the three, he would prefer the freeze.

5. Mr Bowles said that the majority of people to whom he had spoken agreed with Mr Goss. He had personal fears concerning lease-back; it would surely mean that we would acknowledge the Argentine claim to the Islands; if Argentina then went to the ICJ, the latter might overturn the lease-back, and the Islands would be handed over totally to Argentina. Mr Ridley countered this point by reminding Councillors that negotiations on lease-back (or any other basis) would be without commitment and without prejudice to the claims of each side, in the same way as negotiations took place under the Antarctic Treaty.

6. Mr Miller had not yet made up his mind. Public opinion still seemed very divided, and many wanted to "go it alone". He was not personally hopeful that Argentina would accept either a freeze or a lease-back. But although the Islands could no doubt carry on in the absence of a solution, they would still be faced with a declining population and a stagnating economy. Indeed Mr Ridley had hinted that the Islanders should not expect more than the present level of UK aid. His current thinking was that Mr Ridley should try to obtain a negotiated settlement. If this was on the basis of lease-back, he would like the package to include the possibility of independence in due course. He added that the Islanders would not be able to tolerate Argentine flags.

7. Mr Evans said that the feelings in the Camp were bound to be less strong than in Port Stanley, because in the former there was no contact with Argentines. In Port Stanley people were confused; not one of the four possibilities (Mr Ridley's three proposals, or doing nothing) were satisfactory. People needed time to make up their minds. They were suspicious of Argentina, and did not trust them to hold to an agreement. He feared that by raising these ideas

at this stage, a lot of damage had been done, and the exodus would increase. The Governor pointed out that the reaction in the Camp might be different from that in Stanley because the former were more involved in the main economic activity of the Island, sheep farming, and therefore were more aware of the realities of the situation. Mr Miller agreed; managers were aware that sheep farming could not continue for long as presently organised in the Island.

8. Mrs Jennings said that the flag would be the crucial issue. If the Argentine flag was never raised, people would be happy. Of the two dozen or more people she had spoken to, the majority would favour lease-back but people did not wish to commit themselves yet.

9. Mr Bennett agreed with his colleagues. He said that those he had talked to would "rather pay the price of freedom". The Falkland Islanders had supported Britain in the Second World War, and had suffered casualties.

10. Mr Rowlands believed that people wished to dig their heels in. Some were even talking of abrogating the YPF and Communications Agreements. He was surprised at the general hardline reaction. He wanted more time to discuss the issue. One question he was asking himself was whether the Islanders could present their case better at the United Nations. He thought there would be international support of the Islands if the Islanders said that they were considering the possibility of independence, and would seek it the day that Argentina gave up her claim.

11. Mr Morrison thought that people were stiffening their resolve against any negotiations. He wondered whether any other ideas were feasible; might another power help defend the Islands, if that power was leased a base? Might a UN mission visit the Islands to see that the Islanders wished to remain under Britain, and therefore erode international support for Argentina? Might even one of the smaller Islands be ceded to Argentina as a price for ending the dispute?

12. Mr Ridley sought to comment on the various points Councillors had raised. Clearly people were concerned over the question of the flag. This would of course have to be part of the negotiations. As to whether Argentina could be trusted, obviously that could not be guaranteed; the question was would one be able to trust them more after they had signed an agreement than now. He personally believed that they would respect an agreement, but if at some stage a mad Argentine Government took control, and sought to overturn the lease agreement, we would have as much right to defend our leasehold as now to defend our freehold. Mr Rowlands' idea of introducing the concept of eventual independence was worth considering. But he doubted if it would be compatible

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with closer economic and commercial links with Argentina, which the Islands needed. Some people had mentioned the United Nations in a defence context; he pointed out that diplomatic support was very different from military support. UN peacekeeping forces were only deployed after hostilities had taken place and at the request of both sides. There was clearly a general need for more time to consider the issues. He would not press for an early reply. The Governor would need to send advice to London as to the views of Islanders and Councillors. Councillors should talk to people all over the Islands, not allowing them to believe that the problems and questions disappeared as soon as Mr Ridley left the Islands. If the situation of the Islanders became difficult, consequent upon Argentine provocation or actual hostilities, of course Britain would help; but Islanders should remember that if they had brought these conditions on to themselves by refusing even to explore possible solutions in negotiation, it would be more difficult for the British Government to ask the British public to provide greater help for the Islands. Britain did not have a bottomless pit of resources. As to possible timings, if the Islanders decided that Mr Ridley should not negotiate seriously with the Argentines, he would have to tell them soon. That might be best done in a meeting rather than by a message. If on the other hand the Islanders were in favour of continuing negotiations, it might theoretically be possible to reach an agreed outlined settlement by the middle of next year; but to negotiate all the details of a settlement would take a year at least.

13. Mr Wallace intervened to say that Councillors were not in the least wanting Mr Ridley not to negotiate further. They were only commenting on the proposals he had put forward. (Mr Goss disagreed with Mr Wallace). Mr Ridley asked what he could negotiate about in those circumstances? He could not go over the same ground time and time again with the Argentines; they wanted to talk about sovereignty. So if Britain could not talk about that subject, there was nothing else, and it was folly to believe that negotiations could continue ad infinitum about nothing at all.

14. Mr Miller asked what kind of answer Mr Ridley sought from the Councillors; was it simply a mandate to explore possibilities in negotiations, or should Councillors set out what they believed to be the Islanders' minimum requirements. Mr Ridley expected the former. But he repeated that Mr Wallace's earlier point that agreement to negotiate amounted to some sort of acceptance in principle of the ideas of lease-back or freeze was valid.

15. Mr Wallace expressed sincere appreciation that Mr Ridley had come to consult the Islanders, and to do so publicly. But he was a little surprised that Mr Ridley should describe the Argentines as putting increased pressure on Britain for continuing negotiations. Mr Monk had not given that impression when he returned from the April negotiations in New York. Might Argentine Government representatives come to talk to the Councillors, so that they could gauge the pressure there was in Buenos Aires? Also, people were wondering what was the British Government's motive. Mr Ridley replied that there had been private as well as public indications during the New York talks that further negotiations had to be based on a discussion of sovereignty. There was also pressure through the Argentine Ambassador in London, and on our Ambassador in Buenos Aires. As to British motives, the Cabinet, Mr Ridley and the FCO all judged that it was in the interests of Islanders to settle the dispute, because that would lead to security and the possibility of prosperity. Of course failure to settle the dispute did cost us a little and our resources were not inexhaustible; but our main motive was to keep the Islands British, and to remove the crippling hand of the dispute.

16. Discussion ensued on whether Argentine representatives should be invited as Mr Wallace had suggested. Mr Goss thought it would be inconceivable. Mr Ridley suggested it might be better to send a delegation of Councillors to Buenos Aires to see Commodoro Cavandoli.

17. Mr Bowles commented that the interests of Islanders might be very different from their wishes. The two should not be muddled, and it was the wishes which were paramount. Mr Ridley replied that that was why he was in the Islands, to consult them on their wishes. But Councillors must recognise that a decision, and the responsibility for its consequences, belonged to the Islanders. If they wanted negotiations, and these were successful, the credit belonged to them; similarly if they decided to reject negotiations, the consequences following from that rejection were their responsibility. Mr Gozney suggested that Islanders should not be swayed or distracted by what the Argentine newspapers might say in forthcoming days.

18. Mr Wallace ruefully remarked that not many people wanted to be Councillors. Mr Ridley commented that as a politician there were times when one had to lead.

19. Mr Rowlands said that if further talks took place, the Councillors would

expect an invitation to be represented. He regretted that only one Councillor was allowed to be present at the New York talks. Mr Ridley explained that that had been a question of cost and the relative size of the two delegations. But of course if we embarked on serious negotiations, more than one Councillor could attend.

20. Mr Rowlands proposed a vote of thanks on behalf of the Councillors and Islanders generally. This was sincerely echoed. The Governor added his own thanks. He thought that Mr Ridley's visit had focussed minds on the real question; the onus was now on himself and the Councillors to engage in this debate so that they could give a faithful and genuine report on public opinion. Mr Ridley was grateful for these expressions of thanks.

21. The meeting broke up at 11.15.

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