

Ref: A08197

MR COLES

MT

Falkland Island Population

My minute to you of 21 April about the Falkland Island Company recorded agreement at official level that, since on Mr Needham's latest evidence few Falkland Islanders were expected to want to leave, the Government need do no more than be ready to deal sympathetically with any who turned up in Montevideo needing help for onward travel to the United Kingdom. Since then new evidence (BIS Buenos Aires tel no 26) from a Mrs Mercer who left the Islands on 17 April suggests that many of the islanders are feeling the lack of any guidance, and may be anxious to leave temporarily to avoid being caught in cross fire between British and Argentine forces, but cannot afford to do so by their own means and are therefore disappointed not to have been offered financial assistance by the Government.

2. In these circumstances the conclusion of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at official level, with which the Ministry of Defence, Home Office and Treasury agree, is that

a. The point has now been reached where, unless clearer guidance is given to the Islanders, the Government could come under increasing criticism both from them and from public opinion here;

b. it is not in our interest to encourage a mass exodus from the Islands, and there would be both practical as well as political difficulties if we were to do so;

c. we should therefore issue a statement to the effect that we attach importance to the safety of the Islanders, and that, if there are any who would prefer to leave the Islands temporarily until the immediate crisis is past, we will give sympathetic help to ensure that they are not prevented from doing so by lack of means;

d. this statement should be quickly publicised, eg on the BBC World Service, since with the approach of the Task Force any movement out of the Islands may soon become impossible.



3. Sir Antony Acland believes that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would be in agreement with these proposals. If the Prime Minister is content you may wish to authorise the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to take the necessary action forthwith. There are longer-term implications of seeming to encourage departures from the Islands, and she may prefer to have the matter discussed at Chequers on 25 April; but the regular weekly flight to Argentina on 27 April may well be the last for some time; and, though we believe the Argentines to be currently running a more frequent service, they may soon have to stop doing so.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Home Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Defence Secretary and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

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ROBERT ARMSTRONG

22 April 1982