

*B. B. C.*

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY MR REX HUNT ON TUESDAY 15 JUNE 1982

Ladies and gentlemen good afternoon and welcome to this opportunity for Mr Rex Hunt to meet with you. As you will know, the Government's decision that Mr Hunt should return to the Falkland Islands was announced by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons this afternoon in the following terms: 'Mr Rex Hunt and members of the Islands' Council at present in this country will return as soon as possible. Mr Hunt will concentrate on civilian matters, General Moore will be responsible for military matters. They will in effect act as Civil and Military Commissioners and will of course work in the closest co-operation.' Those are the terms in which Mrs Thatcher announced to the House of Commons this afternoon the good tidings that Mr Hunt would be returning to the Falkland Islands, and it is my pleasure to present him to you again this afternoon.

Mr Rex Hunt: Thank you. I would like to say how delighted I was to hear the Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons this afternoon. I heard the news of the surrender last night with a feeling of immense relief and everlasting gratitude to Mrs Thatcher and the armed forces and merchant marines for sticking by the Falkland Islanders and seeing the thing through. I now look forward to going back with my Councillors, Councillor Luxton and Councillor Baker and Councillor Cheek, who is busy entertaining somewhere else at the present time, as soon as possible on the first available flight that MOD will give us. Thank you.

Status of Civil Commissioner

Question: How do you feel about losing your job as Governor?

Mr Rex Hunt: I haven't lost a job as Governor. I am going back to exercise the full civil responsibilities as I did before as Governor. But naturally the other part of it, Commander-in-Chief, I had 42 Marines, there are now about four times as many troops there as there are Islanders. So it makes sense that a Military Commander should look after those. I am very glad that General Moore is there with that responsibility.

Changes in the Falklands

Question: Do you think that things, and perhaps your colleagues the Councillors could also tell us, can things ever be the same again on the Island?

Mr Rex Hunt: No, I don't think they will ever be the same. But I look forward to them being a lot better.

Question: Mr Luxton?

Mr Luxton: I would say hear, hear to that.

Question: Mr Baker?

Mr Baker: Yes, I agree. Let's face it, we ought to have a good deal more financial aid if nothing else at our disposal.

Question: Could I just follow that up, Governor? On the one hand, Mrs Thatcher did seem to be stressing that things will be the same, that there is going to be no negotiations, there is going to be a time for settling down. On the other hand, there are certain internal changes envisaged by what she said. Your status is different and the status of the Council may be different. Can you sort of pull those two together for us and sort of explain how you think it will be different or it won't be different?

Mr Rex Hunt: No, I don't think my status as Governor will be different. I don't think the status of the Councillors will be different. When I get back there the first thing I shall do is to call, one of the first things, is to call a meeting of the Legislative Council. We have to pass our budget for the 82/83 year. We run the American year, 1 July. That will be the first thing and we will do it in exactly the same way as we have always done it. The status of Executive Council and Legislative Council and my status as Chairman of both will be exactly the same. And this will continue until the Islanders themselves have had time to settle down and recover from the shock of military occupation. And then we can think of the long-term future and see how they

wish to determine their own future and if any constitutional changes are required then.

Question: Some of it will be the same but how do you think things will be different?

Mr Rex Hunt: I think materially things will be different. Of course, because to begin with we will have four times the Island population there for a while as troops. And the rehabilitation will take some time, the rehabilitation and reconstruction. I think when I said I was optimistic about the future things would be better, I think this is because the sovereignty dispute will not be hanging over our heads. It was the uncertainty of the sovereignty dispute that kept quite a lot of investment, and I think quite a lot of people away from the Islands, and perhaps sent a few of the Islanders away from the Islands. I think that after this, as long as the security of the Islands can be guaranteed, then there will be more certainty and there will be more attraction to investment and to people coming in.

Nature of Mr. Hunt's appointment

Mr John Miller: Some kind of an interim appointment, Mr Hunt, or do you envisage being there in this job for say a full year or even two years?

Mr Rex Hunt: I have no idea how long I shall be there. My normal term would have been three years. I was due to finish in April or May next year had Galtieri not interrupted my tour and I just don't know how things will be. We will have to wait and see. We will have to see how things settle down when the Islands get back to normality.

Mr Tom McMullan: Governor, how did you react to the sort of semi-inspired stories that your return would make you look like a colonial symbol?

Mr Rex Hunt: I didn't react to that at all. I mean, all the way through if there was a chance that we could have saved lives by my not going back or by the position of

Governor being altered in some way, then of course that was a bargaining counter. But after the surrender last night that possibility was finished. And there is no doubt that I am going back to resume my civic responsibilities as Governor.

Role for Argentines?

Mr Keith Graves: I wonder if I could ask the Islanders themselves if they see, not in the short-term, but in the long-term, any role at all for the Argentines, not necessarily even on the Islands but perhaps in political discussions? Do they see the Argentines having any role at all to play in the future of the Falklands?

Mr Rex Hunt: They saw a very little role for them before this all happened. I would think that they would see even less role for them after what they have been through.

Question: Mr Luxton?

Mr Luxton: Absolutely, I agree with that.

Question: Mr Baker?

Mr Baker: Yes, I think this action has put any possibility of such a role back many, many years.

Timing

Question: Is there any clue as to when you are going back there?

Mr Rex Hunt: No, I'm sorry. The Prime Minister said as soon as possible. So we are now in the hands of the MOD.

Title

Question: Will you actually be called Governor or, if not, why not?

Mr Rex Hunt: I am called Governor now, I think Mr Fenn introduced me as Governor Hunt. I am sure that when I get back to the Islands I shall be called Governor just as General Moore will be called General.

/Question:

Question: Mrs Thatcher seemed to make a point of calling you the Civil Commissioner, not Governor, in her statement in the Commons.

Mr Rex Hunt: Well, frankly, I couldn't care less whether I am called Governor or Civil Commissioner or Senior Sixer as long as I can get back and get on with the job of rehabilitation and getting on helping the Islanders.

Expanded self-government

Question: One further point if I can ask? The Prime Minister made it clear that she wants to see the democratic process on the Islands expanded. Do you have any idea how this will take place, how this will happen, what sort of democratic process you have now and how it will change?

Mr Rex Hunt: This is of course for discussion with the Councillors when we get back and over the months. Certainly, we could see, at present we have six elected Legislative Councillors and three officials. We could have fewer officials. We have an Executive Council at the moment of six. I nominate two of those. Two of them are elected from the Legislative Councillors and the other two are official. Again, there could be some development that way, so that the Executive Council becomes more democratic and more representative.

~~Mr John Miller: Could you tell us if any kind of a ceremony is envisaged? If anybody will be going out from London to join you on the lawn in Governor House, some kind of a ceremony?~~

~~Mr Rex Hunt: I don't think this is my question to answer. Nick, you may know more than I do?~~

~~Mr Nick Fenn: Not without notice, Sir. We'd need to enquire into that. Any other questions?~~

Attitude to the job

Question: You seem to regard the Falklands as something more than a job now. Do you understand what I mean? You regard it as being your fiefdom. If a Diplomat has to leave a place normally then that's it. But you seem to regard

it as a very personal thing, as much more than a job.

Mr Rex Hunt: I don't feel possessive in any way. But certainly I think what has happened has made me feel much closer to the Islanders than if life had carried on normally all the way through. And yes, I do regard this very emotionally and I am so gratified that the Prime Minister is sending me back.

Damage on the Islands

Mr John Miller: I don't want to sound frivolous because of the damage that has been done to the Islands, but I just wondered if you'd had any snippets at all back from Stanley about the condition of the Governor's house or the maroon taxi or anything like that?

Mr Rex Hunt: No, I think the only thing I have heard you probably heard this morning, Max Hastings mentioning that lovely lawn in front of Government House on which we used to play croquet had been dug up for slit trenches. I don't know what the inside of Government House is like. But they made quite a mess of it before we left.

Mr Nick Fenn: Max Hastings said that it looked intact from the outside, I think I heard. Michael Brunson?

News of Repossession

Mr Michael Brunson: You described to us very dramatically the moment when you actually had to leave the Islands on your last meeting with us. What about the precise moment when you heard the news last night? Can you tell us how that came about and was your wife with you or the Councillors were with you?

Mr Rex Hunt: I was out for dinner. I got back rather late and my wife said that all the press in London seemed to have been ringing and telling me about this. And that was the first that I had heard. And then the Foreign Office rang and told me. No, I think the feeling was one of immense relief and I remember saying to my wife that I hadn't felt like this since VJ Day.

/Mr Michael Brunson:

Mr Michael Brunson: Did you break open a bottle?

Mr Rex Hunt: We did this morning, not last night, no.

Mr Michael Brunson: What time this morning, Mr Hunt?

Mr Rex Hunt: 7.00 am.

Question: Mr Hunt, the indications are that the conditions in Port Stanley aren't going to be very pleasant. Are you going back immediately with your family or do you plan to return by yourself?

Mr Rex Hunt: We are still discussing this. It's a question of priorities. It is a vexed question. I think that if we have to go back without our wives and children, then of course we will do that in advance hoping that they will follow shortly. But it is still under consideration.

Economic Potential

Mr Patrick Keatley: Could you give us, and perhaps we could ask Mr Luxton and Mr Baker about this too, could you give us some idea of the potential of the territory? We know it's pretty big and Shackleton's report of course is being updated, so you can't pre-empt that. But what you see yourself as Governor and your other two colleagues there as Falklanders of the potential for development, assuming that you can get security and continuity?

Mr Rex Hunt: I could go on a long time, but very briefly and then I will ask my Councillors to chip in. We can certainly improve the carrying capacity of the land. We can improve the number of sheep we carry. We can improve the number of cattle, increase the number of cattle. We can improve the survival rate of the sheep. We can improve the value we get for the wool by having things like a scouring mill and a knitting mill. We can export the clean wool instead of the dirty wool as we do now. There are stacks of potentialities that way. We have the largest kelp bags, that's seaweed bags, in the world around the Falkland Islands

and we already have an American firm very interested in investing in the kelp, which will bring in a lot of money to the Government, to the Falkland Islands Government. We have inshore fisheries which need developing. Shackleton recommended that they be developed. We have salmon ranching, which has a great potential. They are doing it successfully in Chile now. There is no reason why we shouldn't do it in the Falklands. We have very good streams and excellent sea trout now that have been brought in. There are several other opportunities apart from the oil, the potential of oil, and deep off-shore fisheries.

Question: Mr Luxton?

Mr Luxton: I think the only one I would add to that that perhaps Mr Hunt missed out was the potential for export of meat which we don't have at the moment. There is tremendous room for development in that.

Question: Mr Baker?

Mr Baker: Not a lot to add to that without going into detail. But one must also bear in mind that the Islands are a springboard to the Antarctic.

Question: Can you in fact make the developments you are talking of like exporting meat without the co-operation in some way of the Argentines who are the nearest land that you have to worry about?

Mr Rex Hunt: Yes, we export our wool at the moment, the whole of our wool clip comes to England. We have the ship that brings the wool. That could easily with cold storage containers bring our carcass mutton back here. So it is possible to find markets here without having to go to Argentina.

Question: ?

Mr Rex Hunt: Yes, providing we can find somebody who will give us the money to build an abattoir and a freezer

plant up to EEC requirements, then we already have a large British firm who has guaranteed to buy our surplus mutton.

Question: An extension of that question. Is there any problem that you envisage either practical or political in re-establishing lines of communication with Uruguay, Montevideo rather than Buenos Aires?

Mr Rex Hunt: I see big problems, yes. I just don't know the relations will develop between the Argentine and Uruguay and Chile. We will have to consider ways and means of communicating with Britain and with Europe if we can't use those South American countries.

Style

Question: In what ways do you feel you may change your style of governorship, given this suggestion that you will be continuing a kind of colonial role, albeit unwittingly?

Mr Rex Hunt: I don't really know what style I had before except to get to know the people and to do what I could to develop the colony. I think life may get a little more difficult if we get many more people coming in, as we may, and of course as long as we have a large military garrison then there are bound to be difficulties and problems over housing and accommodation and perhaps between civilians and military. And this is all quite different from the old days with only a garrison of 42.

Question: I was thinking particularly you had this day yesterday, a sort of independence day or rather the celebrations of the liberation of the Islands. Don't you feel that there is going to be a demand from the Islanders for kind of ceremonies which perhaps would be unwise?

Mr Rex Hunt: There was a great demand from the Islanders for the 150th anniversary celebrations on 3 January 1983. And I'm quite sure when we get back that that is one of the things the Islanders will want to celebrate in a big way. And I don't see any reason why they shouldn't.

/Question:

Communications

Question: I just wanted to raise a question about the communications which we've already touched on. But presuming you get the airstrip in working order, how on earth are you going to solve the problem of long range air communications with the Islands, given what you have just said about problems with neighbouring South American countries?

Mr Rex Hunt: It is going to be very uneconomic. We are going to need subsidies if we are going to have air communications from Ascension. I think we must look again at sea communications and it may be that sea communications will be, in the long-term until we get back to relations with Latin America, it may be that sea communications will have to be our only communications for a while.

Cost of Reconstruction and Development

Mr John Miller: Has the Government earmarked a sum of money for reconstruction? Can you tell us what it is or what you would like?

Mr Rex Hunt: No, I can't tell you whether they have earmarked funds or not. I just don't know. We have been discussing what we want. I have said that we would require £30 million over the next five years, that is the Falkland Islands Government, for basic infrastructure. That is, not including the airport, that is repairing the roads of Stanley, a new water system, electricity supply, that sort of thing. I think that if we can have five/six million pounds a year over the next five years that that will be as much as we can absorb for improving our basic infrastructure in Stanley.

Question: No further improvements? That doesn't cover putting right the damage that may have been done?

Mr Rex Hunt: Well, I just don't know until we get back what that is going to be.

Question: That figure that you mentioned, you didn't have that in mind when you thought of this figure?

Mr Rex Hunt: No. This is what we needed when I left.

Mr Nick Fenn:                    You know, of course, that the Prime Minister has invited Lord Shackleton to update his report and clearly Government decisions in this field will await the presentation of the updated report. Ladies and gentleman, thank you very much.