



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

10 December 1982

Prime Minister

To note

A.P.C. 10/12

Dear John,

Falkland Islands: Nationality

You asked about the praise from the Buenos Aires Herald (Buenos Aires telno 515) for the decision to extend full citizenship to all inhabitants of the islands.

I enclose a copy of the Buenos Aires Herald editorial. It is rather confused. It welcomes the proposal not only because it makes HMG's commitment to the Islanders clearer but also, paradoxically, because it will make it easier for Britain to re-open negotiations for a transfer of sovereignty. It seems to suggest that once the Islanders have obtained full British citizenship they will no longer feel so strongly about the Islands. This is a most implausible thesis, particularly given the fact that 1400 of the 1800 Islanders will become British citizens anyway on 1 January 1983.

We have always recognised that the granting of full British citizenship to the Islanders, although welcome to them and their supporters in the UK, would be a two-edged sword. When a similar proposal was due to be put to the House of Lords last year we consulted our Embassy in Buenos Aires on the likely Argentine reaction. The Ambassador's conclusion was that the Argentines were more likely to welcome the move than oppose it, because it would strengthen their argument that the Islanders were not a 'people' to whom the principles of self-determination applied, but British citizens whose strongest links were with the UK. During the conflict, the Argentine propadandists made much of the apparent anomaly whereby HMG were prepared to defend the Islands but not to allow their inhabitants to be full British citizens: the Islanders were often referred to as 'second-class' citizens. That is one taunt which could no longer be made if Baroness Vickers's Bill becomes law, but we may expect a correspondingly more difficult time prosecuting our case at the UN because of the apparent (but unintended) weakening of the link between the people and the territory.

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I am copying this letter and its enclosures to the Private Secretaires to the Defence Secretary, the Home Secretary and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever

J E Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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MY TELNO 515 : BENOS AIRES HERALD EDITORIAL

1. TEXT IS AS FOLLOWS :

"BRITAIN TAKES A FIRM STEP"

THE DECISION BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO BACK A PLAN TO GRANT FULL CITIZENSHIP TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE MALVINAS ISLANDS IS THE ONLY RATIONAL AND COHERENT MOVE THE LEADERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM COULD HAVE MADE. IT IS A DECISION WHICH WILL MAKE ANY EVENTUAL NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE DISPUTED ISLANDS EASIER AND ONE WHICH, LONDON MUST REALIZE, WILL MAKE THE BRITISH STANCE ON THE ISLANDS QUESTION CLEARER TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. UP TO THE PRESENT TIME, THE LITTLE BETTER THAN SECOND-CLASS STATUS GRANTED TO A NUMBER OF THE BRITISH SUBJECTS LIVING ON THE WINDSWEPT SOUTH ATLANTIC ISLANDS HAS BEEN A REAL LIABILITY TO BRITAIN IN ITS DIPLOMATIC MOVES TO ESTABLISH A HARD CLAIM OF ANY KIND OVER THE ISLANDS OR IN TRYING TO JUSTIFY THE NEED TO GO TO WAR WITH ARGENTINA OVER POSSESSION OF THE ISLANDS.

SELF-DETERMINATION WAS A HARD CASE TO SUPPORT, SINCE IT WAS NOT AS IF THE Kelpers WERE SEEKING INDEPENDENCE AND WERE BEING IMPEDED FROM DOING SO BY ARGENTINA. THEY WERE, INSTEAD, STATING THEIR DESIRE TO BE RECOGNIZED FOR WHAT THEY CONSIDERED THEMSELVES: BRITISH CITIZENS. BUT WHILE THE ISLANDERS DESCRIBED THEMSELVES AS BRITISH SUBJECTS AND WHILE PRIME MINISTER MARGARET THATCHER SENT TROOPS AND WARSHIPS TO DEFEND BRITISH CITIZENS AGAINST A FOREIGN POWER, THE WORLD WAS AWARE OF THE FACT THAT A GOODLY NUMBER OF THE ISLANDERS WERE NOT ENTITLED TO BE ANYTHING BUT OCCASIONAL VISITORS TO BRITAIN ITSELF; BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT TECHNICALLY BORN BRITISH, IN THE BROADEST SENSE BUT BORN ON LANDS POSSESSED BY BUT NOT INTEGRATED INTO THE UNITED KINGDOM. THIS SITUATION SMACKS OF A BY-GONE AGE OF COLONIALISM WHICH COULD NOT POSSIBLY BE HELPFUL TO THE BRITISH DIPLOMATS WHO WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE TO ARGUE THE BRITISH CASE BEFORE INTERNATIONAL BODIES.

MORE IMPORTANT STILL, HOWEVER, IS THE GROWING REALIZATION THAT BRITAIN WILL EVENTUALLY WISH TO GIVE UP ITS CLAIM TO THE ISLANDS AND TURN THEM OVER TO ARGANTINA, PERHAPS IN A DECADE OR SO FROM NOW, PERHAPS LATER. UERTAINLY SUCH A HANDOVER WILL PROBABLY BE INEVITABLE. THE ISLANDS CANNOT - A TRAGIC WAR WHICH LEFT BEHIND DEEP SCARS BETWEEN TWO PARTS OF THE WESTERN WORLD AS DEMONSTRATED - BE HELD BY BRITAIN ON THE STRENGTH OF MERE VERBAL OR WRITTEN CLAIM. THE ISLANDS ARE OF LITTLE IF ANY STRATEGIC VALUE TO BRITAIN AND OF DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC VALUE WITHOUT THE COOPERATION OF A FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURING MAINLAND POWER. GIVEN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS OUTRAGEOUSLY EXPENSIVE FOR BRITAIN TO DEFEND - AT A RATE OF ABOUT THREE MEN PER ISLANDER - THE ISLANDS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR BEING INHABITED BY BRITONS. BY GIVING THE ISLANDERS FULL CITIZENSHIP LONDON WILL SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO WITH THE ISLANDERS WHEN THE DAY COMES FOR AN ANGLO-ARGENTINE ACCORD. THOSE WHO DO TOT WISH TO REMAIN ON THE ISLANDS AFTER SUCH AN ACCORD WILL BE PERFECTLY FREE TO MAKE THEIR HOMES ELSEWHERE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

THE WHOLE SOUTH ATLANTIC CRISIS, HOWEVER, HAS PLACED BRITAIN IN A VERY UNENVIABLE POSITION, SNCE WHILE A HANDFUL OF KELPERS WILL BE EASILY ABSORSED BY THE UNITED KINGDOM, THE DAYS OF THE ONCE ENORMOUS BRITISH EMPIRE HAVE LEFT BEHIND OTHER MORE DIDFICULT TO DEAL WITH RESPONSIBILITIES. SOME 5000 BRITISH SUBJECTS ON ST HELENA HAVE ALREADY ASKED FOR TREATMENT EQUAL TO THAT TO BE GIVEN THE MALVINAS RESIDENTS AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT MUST ALREADY BE AWARE THAT CLAIMS FROM MILLICNS OF HONG KONG CHINESE CANNOT BE FAR BEHIND. IT IS SAD THAT DECISIONS IN THESE AREAS HAVE HAD TO BE PRECIPITATED BY A WAR, BUT THEY WERE HARD FACTS WHICH SOMEDAY WOULD HAVE HAD TO BE FACED ANYWAY. THERE IS NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT FOR BRITAIN TO DO SO.

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