

THE FRIENDS OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE VISCOUNT THURSO OF ULBSTER, J.P.

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NEWS LETTER.

The Falkland Islands are passing through one of the most difficult periods in their history and they need all the support we can give them.

It is with regret that we have to report that morale in the Falkland Islands is at a low ebb. Unusually severe weather conditions, loss of confidence in the Government Executive and delay in a definitive announcement regarding the extension of the airfield have all contributed to this state of affairs. The United Kingdom Falkland Islands Committee is convinced that the answer to the problems of the Colony lies in an extension to the permanent airfield. The Committee has therefore concentrated its effort over the past few months on this one aspect of the Colony's affairs.

THE SHACKLETON ECONOMIC SURVEY.

This long awaited report was finally published in July and was well received in the Colony for its sympathetic understanding of the Islanders and its imaginative and far-reaching recommendations. A copy of an article on the report, published in "Britain and Overseas" in the summer, is enclosed.

PERMANENT AIRFIELD.

Construction of this airfield is nearing completion and the Islanders are concerned lest the engineers and their equipment are withdrawn before a decision is reached by Her Majesty's Government on the extension. Lord Shackleton, in his report, recommends that the airfield be extended and states that without an extension there is strong doubt whether tourism, fisheries and other diversifying industrial potential in the Colony would be realised. Of over-riding importance, too, is the need for H.M.G. to recognise tangibly the major economic contribution the Colony has made to Britain in the past and the continuing value of the present sheepfarming industry. Only by extending the airfield can Britain keep faith with the Islanders and assure them of a permanent British future independent of their mainland neighbours.

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The Committee has made representations to Parliament, to the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and to the Ministry of Overseas Development, to whom the Shackleton Report has been referred for evaluation. A press campaign has also been undertaken.

THE TIMES.

The Committee sponsored a Special Report on the Falkland Islands, comprising 2 pages, which appeared in The Times on 26th August last. The Special Report was very well received by the public and has done much to publicise the Colony and its people.

H.M.S. "ENDURANCE".

The Colony's base vessel is not now to be withdrawn. This is particularly important because of the unfortunate incident in February, 1976 when an Argentine Destroyer intercepted the Royal Research Ship "Shackleton" and fired across her bows in an attempt to force the ship into an Argentinean Port. The courageous action of the Shackleton's Master, Captain P.H. Warne, in refusing to comply with this outrageous demand averted a major incident and won him the admiration of all concerned with the Islands.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS.

The Colony suffered a grievous loss when the one surviving Beaver seaplane crashed in Choiseul Sound resulting in the death of Ian Campbell, its very skilled pilot, who had given a lifetime of dedicated efficient service to the Colony. Ian was born in the Falkland Islands.

The response to a demand for a public enquiry by an expert into the incident was considered unsatisfactory and resulted in the resignation from Executive Council of Mr. Sydney Miller and Mr. John Smith.

Department of Trade and Industry Inspectors were later sent to the Colony to enquire into the accident. This is the first casualty since the Falkland Islands Government Air Service was formed in 1948.

BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY.

Islanders are concerned over the closure of the B.A.S. base at Stanley and see it as a sign of further British disinvolvement from the Colony. The Committee is satisfied, however, from enquiries made that there are no political overtones in the decision.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION.

The Colony was represented at the C.P.A. Conference held in Mauritius recently, again by Mr. L.G. Blake on behalf of Legislative Council.

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GOVERNMENT.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have announced that Mr. Neville French, whose term of office as Governor expires in January, 1977, will be replaced by Mr. J.R.W. Parker, O.B.E.

LOCAL COMMITTEE IN STANLEY.

The U.K. Committee and the Local Committee have continued to work closely together and the effectiveness of the liaison was increased by visits to the U.K. of the Chairman of the Local Committee, Mr. Jack Abbott, and 2 of his Committee members, Mr. G. Cheek and Mr. F. Reive.

In March, members of the Local Committee sent an open letter to every Member of Parliament expressing their views on the current situation and calling for support. The all party response was most encouraging.

MEETING WITH M.P.'s.

In July, Sir Nigel Fisher, M.P., who is a member of the U.K. Falkland Islands Committee, and Lady Fisher very kindly held a reception at their flat in Westminster at which visiting Islanders were able to meet the Minister of State, Mr Edward Rowlands, and several Members of Parliament.

More than 20 Islanders were present at the reception and many of them accepted the Minister's invitation to an informal meeting at the Foreign Office the following morning.

THE CHURCH.

An Anglican delegation from the Falkland Islands met the Archbishop of Canterbury last July to discuss the future position of the Falklands, at present forming part of the diocese of Argentina and Eastern South America. The Islanders wish to retain their independence ecclesiastically and seek a direct link with Canterbury.

MEMBERSHIP.

Many Friends have asked what they can do to help, apart from making subscriptions and recruiting others. Please write or speak to your M.P. and ask him or her to impress on the British Government the urgency of a decision to lengthen the new airfield, before Johnston Construction Co. remove their men and machines in January, 1977.

FALKLAND ISLANDS ACTION GROUP.

Young Falkland Islanders in the U.K. have formed themselves into the Falkland Islands Action Group and they have already gained much publicity for the cause in the press and on radio.

Specially contributed for BRITAIN & OVERSEAS by P.G. Mitchell

The Shackleton Report published in July is an imaginative and comprehensive survey of the contribution to Britain's economy made by this loyal Colony in the past and of its potential value to Britain facing restrictions on traditional fishing areas and economic pressure from the oil-producing countries.

The terms of reference excluded questions relating to the political future of the Islands and the report has been prepared on the basis that their status would remain the same as for the past 150 years, a British Colony. There can be no doubt, however, that Lord Shackleton and his team have developed a sympathetic understanding for the problems facing 2,000 British people 7,000 miles away from their homeland. The report recommends British development onshore and offshore but warns that without Argentine co-operation full development, particularly offshore, will be inhibited.

Extended Airfield

Lord Shackleton states that without an extension to the airfield there is strong doubt whether tourism, fisheries and other diversifying industrial potential would be realised to any significant degree. Every Islander and every business interest in the Colony will welcome the strong recommendation that the permanent airfield presently being built by Johnston Construction Ltd. be extended by some 950 metres. Apart from the extension being a pre-requisite of economic development the Islanders would regard it as a tangible sign that Britain believes in a British future for the Colony. The extended airfield would free the Colony from Argentine communications constraints and overcome problems of defence.

The cost of the extension would have to be met by a grant from the U.K. but the figures show that U.K. tax revenue from the Colony since 1951 exceeds U.K. aid over that period if the airfield cost is excluded. Moreover, the Falklands have been contributing to the British Exchequer since 1880 when they ceased to be a Grant-in-Aid Colony. Their exports to this Country bring in £2 million in hard currency annually to Britain and they spend most of it here. If the airfield extension grant is made Britain would be returning to the Colony part of its contribution over the past century and would provide a launching pad for development which would have immeasurable benefit to the U.K. economy. The proposed development programme would cost an estimated £5.4 million over the next five years and the report states that although this appears large in relation to the small population it is appropriate in relation to the resource potential and past transfer of funds to the U.K.

The report covers in great detail the development potential for fisheries, oil and gas, tourism, alginates and agriculture. The fisheries section is a particularly constructive and imaginative survey. It is stated that stocks of krill, a shrimp-like creature may represent the largest untapped source of protein in the World. The fish species thought likely to be of greatest importance are hake, blue whiting and Falkland herring. It is estimated that the yield of blue whiting alone may be in the region of 1 million tons a year. These waters are already extensively fished by Russian vessels and an estimate of a total of 350,000 tons of fish and krill in six months is quoted from German sources.

Seaweed Potential

A British public company, Alginate Industries Ltd., has surveyed the seaweed potential and regards the area as containing the largest untapped reserves in the World. A licensing agreement has been entered into with the Government of the Falkland Islands and a pilot project established but the Company has been deterred from proceeding to full production because of political uncertainties. If certain assurances and undertakings are given by the British Government the Company would hope to be in full operation in

1980. It is estimated that the initial operation in the Falkland Islands would bring in annually £3m. in foreign exchange to Britain.

A corollary of the airfield extension is tourism which Lord Shackleton estimates has a potential retained gross income for the Colony of £340,000 per annum. Apart from its wild-life attractions the Colony has the appeal to the North American market of a territory 350 miles from South America with an English speaking community and a British way of life.

Oil Exploration

Although a powerful consortium of North American Oil Companies has submitted to the British Government an attractive proposal for oil exploration off-shore the Falklands, the Shackleton report tends to play down the possibilities. No doubt this is wise policy pending the clarification of territorial waters and the acceptance by Argentina that the British claim to the Islands is unassailable in International Law but nonetheless development there will have to be in response to demand. In this particular development most people would agree with Lord Shackleton that participation by Argentina is essential.

In two other potential development areas the report is disappointing. It had been thought that the Economist Intelligence Unit team would recommend the establishment of an off-shore financial centre in the Colony, particularly as they had earlier recommended tax-haven status for another British territory in a similar financial position. The arguments adduced for their point of view are far from convincing.

The recommendations relating to philately have been widely condemned in the philatelic press. If the recommendation of the Shackleton report for the appointment of a dealer as marketing agent instead of the Crown Agents were to be appointed the Falkland Islands would lose their position as one of the top ten collectable countries with severe adverse consequences to their revenue.

Everyone with the future well-being of the Colony and its people at heart will be grateful to Lord Shackleton and his team for producing this balanced report. The team was appointed from outside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or any other Government Department and this gives added force to the recommendations. Unlike the many previous reports prepared for the Colony this one is likely to be accepted and acted upon by individuals and trading organisations given the backing and support of the British Government. If the British Government does not respond to the report it will have let down the Islanders and missed a golden opportunity to strengthen its own economy.