

issues could have been addressed. That will was not visible while the first seven years of uneasy peace prevailed.

The Kelpers Themselves

For long often ignored in the dispute, the Falkland Islanders themselves have since the war more than come into their own. Neither side could fail to observe at the time of the war the emotional appeal to the British sense of justice of not letting some 2,000 British people be handed over to the then Argentine dictatorship. The clear desire of the inhabitants to remain British was obvious to all observers, including of course the Argentine occupation force on the islands.

The British claim to the islands is, as mentioned, based on an interpretation of historic events which is, to say the least, debatable. Much less so is that based on continuous and effective British occupation of the Falklands since 1833 (except for the two and a half months of Argentine rule in 1982) and the will of the people who inhabit them. No British government since the war has failed to understand this advantage. This is reflected in repeated UK references to honouring the 'wishes' of the Kelpers in any measures taken which affect their future, rather than just keeping in mind their 'interests,' as was often the preferred usage in the past.

Buenos Aires has in recent years been well aware of the islanders as well. While given the circumstances it is obviously not willing to agree to abide by their 'wishes', it has been increasingly willing to see them as an inevitable part of any solution which is reached and even as a legitimate interlocutor on a number of issues. The most obvious sign of this was Argentine Foreign Minister Di Tella's attempt to gain their favour, or at least some degree of their confidence, through a number of measures in the mid- to late-nineties. This effort, termed the 'charm offensive,' did not change Falkland opinions on the nature of the Argentine threat to their way of life but it did show the Kelpers a different Argentine face, one of humour and grace, to replace somewhat that of the military invader of a little more than a decade before.¹⁷

The Falklanders themselves have become increasingly worldly and self-confident over the nearly two decades since the war. Reinforced by victory in war, a strengthened British connection, essentially full British citizenship and a wide variety of local government and colony-to-mother-country reforms, and real wealth, they have begun to take a direct part in discussions of the islands' future in a number of forums, most notably the United Nations itself. They are now not only wealthier but also better educated, much more travelled, and infinitely more sensitive to international events than they were in the past. And their links with Chile, although threatened by the Pinochet extradition squabble of 1999, have proved capable of providing a second link with Latin America,

¹⁷ For some thoughts on the 'charm offensive', see Graciela Iglesias, "Los Malvinenses inician un diálogo de fantasía", *La Nación* (14 December 1996), and for background Minister Di Tella's own views in his "Política exterior argentina: actualidad y perspectivas", in Silvia Ruth Jalabe (ed), *La Política exterior argentina y sus protagonistas 1880-1995* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1996), pp. 379-91.