

What is Ours is Ours

—James Pitse

If history really has that uncanny way of repeating itself as we are inclined to believe, then that is the case with Margaret Thatcher's Britain in going to war with Argentina over the Malvinas Islands, for it was the British playwright, George Bernard Shaw, who made the following observation:

"Mr Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, who said to certain sceptics who were pressing him for a more explicit declaration of our war aims, said: "If you try to set forth in a catalogue, what will be the exact settlement of affairs you will find that the moment you leave the area of pious platitudes you will descend into the arena of heated controversy."

"With this deadly sentence Mr Churchill knocked down all the skittles with a single throw, leaving us in the region of abstraction, in which we appear a united nation. Such unanimity is useful in war time, when we will all have to fight for our lives whether we like it or not; but anyone who supposes that it will continue when the war is over and we have to start rebuilding and cleansing up, is deluded by phrases as useless for legislative purposes as algebraical symbols which represent quantities but give no information as to qualities of what."

LOSS

That is the case with the Malvinas. Irreparable loss has been caused by the war in human life and material. And nothing has been solved by the pride of the decaying empire. And to Argentina, as history clearly indicates; what is theirs, is theirs. And for Britain the war was not a game. Not with the loss of the prestigious troop carrier like H.M.S. Sheffield. There is also the tussle over the reasons for the declaration of the war itself. Labour opposition leader Michael Foot turned down an invitation from Margaret Thatcher to hold talks with other political leaders on the crisis.

It all happened on April 2, when Argentina carried out the occupation of the Islands without firing a single shot at the British. The Union Jack was lowered, neatly folded and returned to the outgoing governor. The British then countered by sending a huge Naval force, including nuclear submarines and two aircraft carriers. They proclaimed a 200-mile war zone.

NEGOTIATIONS

That was the result of 17 fruitless years of negotiations to gain back what had been unfairly taken from her, Argentina had finally decided to reclaim control of the Malvinas.

But, as far as Argentines are concerned, the question of the Malvinas has little or nothing to do with whatever government happens to be in power in Argentina.

Not all Argentines share the same view on politics or on economics, much less on governments, but they share the same view on the Malvinas. About that there should be no mistake. The Malvinas are a common national cause to the Argentines.

The Malvinas are a group of islands off the coast of Argentina. The British call them the Falklands. They were discovered by the famous Florentine navigator and cartographer, Amerigo Vespucci on April 7, 1504.

Spain held legal rights to the Islands from January 24, 1600 until February 11, 1811. These rights were never formerly disputed by any other nation during that period.

The British moved into the Islands around 1765, were expelled by the Spaniards in February 1768, returned in 1771, and left again on May 20, 1774. Spain then placed the Islands under the jurisdiction of Buenos Aires.

Argentina became an independent nation in July 1816. Up to 1830, the Malvinas were undisputedly a part of Argentina. On January 2, 1883, the British occupied the Islands by force. They ordered the Argentines out and forbade them to return.

Until April 2, 1982, any Argentine had to show his return ticket on arrival, while the Islanders remained second class citizens, with no right of "abode" in Britain unless they are the grandchildren of the British citizens.

Argentina had regained the Islands this year on April 2 not to inflict injury or loss, or to force the community of 17 000 British subjects to change their citizenship.

Article 73 of the United Nations Charter establishes the obligation by member states administering non-autonomous territories to report regularly to the Secretary General of the UN on the conditions in these territories.

Complying with this obligation, Britain has periodically submitted reports to the Secretary General, thus recognising the colonial status of this territory.

On December 2, 1960, resolution 1514 (XV) of the General Assembly established the need to put an immediate end to colonialism. As a result of this resolution, a special committee was set up to deal with cases of decolonisation. This committee of 24 members included the Malvinas Islands in the list of territories to be decolonised.

In 1965, the General Assembly acknowledged the dispute between Argentina and Britain and urged both governments to initiate negotiations without further delay.

Britain consistently stalled on the discussions. For the past 17 years almost no progress has been made. The British negotiators have delayed, procrastinated and refused to take decisions conducive to a reasonable agreement. Always polite, but hardly ever constructive.

PATIENCE

By 1975 Argentina was losing its patience. The government recalled its ambassador to Britain from London and asked the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires to leave. However two years later, talks were resumed at Argentina's initiative.

In 1981, at the United Nations, Argentina warned the United Kingdom that it would not allow the Malvinas to continue being a British colony and asked for renewed and serious negotiations.

Argentina made a final diplomatic proposal in February of this year. It suggested that a permanent committee be set up to deal with the matter. The United Kingdom did not accept this proposal.

Thus, on April 2, 1982, Argentina occupied the Malvinas Islands. On April 23, 1982, a Soviet newspaper, *Sovietskaya*, accused the Thatcher government of using the crisis to justify Britain's militaristic course in international politics. The newspaper further accused the British government of deliberately deceiving the nation's people into thinking that a war with Argentina would be "something of a game".

On Saturday, May 1, International Workers' Day, with the support of American imperialism, British imperialism unleashed a brutal military attack on Argentina that was repudiated all over the world.

TROOPS

British planes and troops brought in by helicopters attacked various



Reagan's helping hand for Britain: 'The aggression was Argentina's'.

Newsweek, May 10, 1982

points in the Malvinas, especially the airport at Port Argentina, while a British submarine torpedoed an Argentine cruiser killing 500. Argentine planes damaged the British aircraft carrier Hermes.

Towards the end of April, 1982, thirty-seven Argentines resident in the United States, inserted the following advertisement in the international Herald Tribune in New York:

"The question of the Malvinas has little or nothing to do with whatever government happens to be in power in Argentina. Not all Argentines share the same views on politics or on economics, much less on governments, but we all share the same view on the Malvinas. About this there should be no mistake. The Malvinas are a common national cause.

"Argentina does not bear a grudge against Britain or its people. There are over 100 000 Argentines of British descent in Argentina. Britain has investments worth billions of dollars in our country. Britain has played a significant role in the making of modern Argentina.

"For almost 150 years, the Malvinas issue has embittered the relationship between two nations that have many things in common. We are a peaceful people. We have not fought a war since the mid-19th century, but we firmly believe that what is ours, is ours. Sorry."