THE INHABITANTS OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS
(by Juan Carlos Moreno)

The special Decolonization Committee of the United Nations gave a favourable recommendation on the Argentine case on the Falkland Islands, and submitted it to the General Assembly for final consideration. The Committee recommended that Argentina and Great Britain should be invited to find a solution to the problem of sovereignty, taking into account the United Nations' objectives and the interests of the Islands' inhabitants. The statement made last year by Argentine Ambassador José María Ruda before the international forum was carefully based on the relevant documents, and was conclusive. At the beginning of 1965, the Argentine Foreign Minister, Dr. Miguel Ángel Zavala Ortiz, reaffirmed Argentina's rights and formulated an official claim. For the first time, since the Archipelago's arbitrary occupation, the task of recuperating our southern Islands was decisively confronted. Argentina's thesis was adhered to by the majority of the countries members of the Decolonization Committee.

United Nations' resolution No 1514 contains two parts: self-determination of the inhabitants and territorial integrity. It was recognized that the Argentine case falls within the terms of the latter. This, therefore, is a case of the re-integration of severed territory, and recognition of the fact is due to Ambassador Ruda, who later declared that Argentina "is willing to negotiate a basic solution to the problem with Great Britain". This dispute may possibly be settled during the current year.

I now consider it necessary to refute some of the declarations made before the United Nations by the British Ambassador, C.E. King, which do not offer a true picture and which have not been duly clarified, probably owing to the lack of sufficient evidence, which can only be obtained directly on the Islands themselves. I had already made reference to this aspect in my book "Nuestras Malvinas" ("Our Falklands"); but here I shall try to explain it more concretely. I am referring to the civil status of the Falklands inhabitants and to their living conditions.

It is not true, as stated by the British representative, that the majority of the Islands' population is British. My
two months' stay in the Archipelago gave me an opportunity to visit its ports, farms and institutions, and talk to the inhabitants, both British and Falkland Islanders. The British and natives form two different sectors, like Spaniards and Indians at the time of the conquest. Only about 15% of the Islands' residents are really British. 85% are native. According to current British statistics, in 1962 there were 36 non-Britishers, 15 Chileans and 3 continental Argentines. The great majority of the population is therefore insular, native, that is, "Falkland Islanders". Only the British can be employed in a public capacity in Government offices and secretariats, in the hospital, schools and in the administrative offices of the farming establishments. Natives are not allowed to hold public posts.

The Islander feels out on a limb and even scorned; he looks upon himself, with wry humour, as a 'kelper' (seaweed), at the mercy of the waves. That is his own expression, as recorded recently by Bernaldo de Quiros during his visit last year. More than thirty years ago Mr. Biggs, an educated native, was nominated – as an exception – a member of the municipal council, and because he complained about British administration he was excluded from the Council.

The natives descend from Scots, Irish, Swedes, Norwegians, Dutch, Danes, Germans, Italians and Latin Americans. There are numerous families who descend from the Scandinavians who towards the middle and end of the last century spent their time whaling in Antarctic waters. And there are many, especially women, who have never left the Archipelago. Amongst those I have met I can remember the Pitaluga family, of Italian origin; the Benders of German descent; the Enestrom, of Norwegian origin; and Llamoza, the only survivor of the original Spaniards who inhabited the Islands under Argentine rule. Father Mario Luis Igone was an Uruguayan; the Maria Auxiliadora nuns were of various nationalities and none of them English, and the watchmaker Morales and the sailor Berrido were Chileans.

The islanders' economic and social requirements would be very much more efficiently satisfied by Argentina than by Great Britain. At present living conditions are not as good as they used to be. The settlers suffered greatly during the last war and they are still in need of many things. The nuns of the...
Maria Auxiliadora religious order, who ran the Catholic school, were obliged to leave. In 1948 the inhabitants sent a petition to London asking that Governor Clifford be recalled on the grounds that "they had no right to vote, no social services, nor old age pensions; education is completely neglected, there are no roads in good condition, and in general, the situation is very bad."

It is arbitrary to say, as was stated by Representative King, that Argentina wants to "annex this small territory against the wishes of the inhabitants." Naturally, the Britisher defends the occupation because he is a patriot and because perhaps he believes that the history set before him is sincere. The Falkland Islander, on the other hand, abstains from supporting the British position and harbours very serious doubts as to the legitimacy of the present occupation. Now and then he hears with surprise, telegraphically or on the wireless, that Argentina claims possession of the Islands. He is not interested in depending on Britain for the simple reason that he does not obtain any benefit from it. Many islanders are hoping that the Argentines will take some basic measure in their favour.

The reasons are obvious. England is too far away from the Falklands and it is very expensive to travel abroad. The islanders' resources are limited and serve to buy articles of prime necessity, with the exception of fish and mutton. Many would prefer to form part of Argentina because of the proximity of its ports and the greater facility to acquire food and medicines. They listen with pleasure to the radio transmissions from Comodoro Rivadavia and Puerto Gallegos. Those who have travelled to Buenos Aires praise its beauty and climate. They know that here they are not and will not be considered colonial subjects but Argentines with the same rights as the rest. This statement is confirmed by numerous Falkland Islanders who have obtained their identity documents as Argentines. John Poynor, an Englishman, who had to serve in a military capacity in the Falklands during the last war, on his return to Buenos Aires registered his two children as Argentines, notwithstanding the fact that they were born in the Falklands.

In 1937 there were nearly 3,000 inhabitants on the Islands and now, according to United Kingdom statistics, there are only 2,172. What is the cause of this demographic decrease? The number of births in the Archipelago is, as in all parts of
the world, greater than the number of deaths. The population does not augment because many of the adults emigrate and do not return to the Islands because of the lack of incentive and the absence of prospects of a better future. They go to Canada or Australia. The Government also restricts the entry of people from abroad and only those who are authorized can enter. Argentines are positively forbidden to settle there. When I disembarked at Port Stanley, the Customs Inspector told me definitely that I could not stay on the Islands nor work there, and even indicated to me the ship on which I should leave. Difficulties are put in the way of travellers between the Falklands and Argentina. An old Argentine, born in Buenos Aires, whom I met in Goose Green, was refused a consular permit to return to Buenos Aires to visit his family after forty years' absence. The authorities prefer that the population be limited to local needs and to those who work in the ports, farms, fisheries and in maritime transportation.

Great Britain knows that morally she has lost the case. Now she does not, as previously, make reference to discovery and occupation because these arguments have been refuted many times by Argentine and foreign historians. She now seizes upon a presumptive right to secular occupation and to nationality and the needs of the Islands' inhabitants. There are two sectors in Great Britain who are interested in maintaining the occupation: the Admiralty, who wishes, though gradually less and less, to keep up a naval base, and the British industrialists interested in sheep farming and whaling. In the Antarctic waters whaling is entirely controlled by the British Government.

Argentina does not wish to annex the Islands, but simply wants them returned. She only wishes to have restored that heritage which was once forcibly taken away. This is a case, as acknowledged by the United Nations' Special Committee, not of decolonization but of territorial reintegration. Therefore, no plebiscite is necessary nor any granting of independence.

If the requirements of the inhabitants were to be taken into consideration, nobody could satisfy these better than Argentina because of her proximity and her love for the Archipelago. When the reincorporation takes place there will be no problems, as is sometimes claimed, regarding the assimilation of the island population. Those who wish to emigrate will be free to do so, although the majority will remain in their land, and will enjoy the economic, social and cultural benefits which they lack at present. The school will immediately teach the children Spanish.

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In any case, is English not spoken here also, and are there not many foreigners who speak their native language and feel at home in this hospitable land? To say that the Falkland Islanders are British because the majority speak English is the same as stating that the North Americans are also English because they speak the language.

The historic truth is that the Falklands passed on through emancipation from Spanish hands to young Argentina, as did the rest of the southern territories down to the South Pole. The Archipelago is a legitimate son of an independent nation from which one day it was violently separated, and the mother will not find peace until the absent son returns home.