

From Farce to Tragedy

Libertarian voices have scarcely been heard about the Falklands during the seven weeks since the crisis began, though there has been more need for them than ever before during the three weeks since our last issue appeared and since the crisis turned into a war.

Not that it has been much of a war yet, at least as we go to press. A few minor ships and aircraft on each side, an Argentine cruiser and a British destroyer, a few hundred Argentine and a few dozen British deaths — this hardly counts on the current scale, when elsewhere in South America and in Central America, Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia, thousands and even millions of people can be killed without getting into the newspapers, let alone on to the television screen.

But a small war can all too easily and quickly grow into a big war, as has happened over and over again, most notably in 1914 and 1939. And this small War happens to involve this country, which is fighting for the first time since the Suez War of 1956 against an enemy outside the old British Empire and for the first time since the Korean War of the early 1950s against an enemy willing and able to fight back.

A lot of nonsense has been said during the crisis about Argentina. It is not a Fascist dictatorship, with a single autocrat ruling through a mass Party. It is a military dictatorship, with a president and a junta (committee) ruling through the three armed services. It may be a bankrupt country, but it is self-sufficient in food and well-armed. Anyway, countries don't stop fighting because they are poor or badly ruled, and no one should imagine that the British only have to huff and puff for Argentina to be blown down.

Nor should anyone imagine that such a dictatorship, however appalling its atrocities against its own people, will find it difficult to unite them behind it now. Patriotism is the first refuge of both rulers and ruled in trouble, and the War seems to be even more popular in Argentina than it is in Britain, which is saying something.

Support for the War may fall in either country when one or both sides begin to suffer serious casualties, but we must assume that we are once more in an all too familiar position, of being a minority within a minority — a tiny libertarian movement inside a small anti-war movement which includes careerist politicians and casuistic Marxists in an uneasy coalition.

The Falklands War is not about two thousand inhabitants of the Falkland Islands, or about the sovereignty over the two tiny islands, or about the principle of preventing aggression. British Governments since the Second World War have abandoned millions of people who wanted to remain British subjects (and prevented them entering 'their' country), have abandoned scores of territories which used to belong to the British Empire, and have condoned dozens of acts of aggression (Vietnam, Cambodia, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Eritrea, Lebanon and so on round the world).

The Falklands War, like the beginning of the two World Wars, is about two groups of powerful but confused countries, both in economic difficulties and with imperialist ambitions, both deeply divided but strongly nationalist, one dictatorial and the other more or less democratic, which have come to blows over a minor quarrel of many years' standing, and which may drag not just their subjects and allies but everyone else into a struggle which began as a farce but is becoming a tragedy.

This is what States do, when they are no longer satisfied with suppressing their own subjects. The vast proportion of national budgets spent on 'defence' must eventually be paid for. (It is ironical that one of the greatest producers of modern weapons in the world is now fighting one of its best customers.) This is what most of the members of the United Nations do most of the time, though their organisation is now being asked to mediate. This is what has been done above all by the United States and the Soviet Union. (It is ironical that the former, only a few years out of Vietnam, was the first mediator, and that the latter, less than only a few months after sponsoring a military dictatorship in Poland, is on the verge of supporting another in Argentina.)

There is no point in arguing in favour of sending the British Armada to the South Atlantic, and then against using it, as the Labour leadership does. There is no point in arguing for an Argentine victory over Britain, as the Marxist sects do. There is no point in arguing for a British victory over Argentina, as most of our fellow-countrymen (though fewer of our fellow-countrywomen) do. There is no point in arguing for any kind of so-called 'just war', as most of the Christian denominations do.

There is no point in arguing for anything except the total libertarian message. Not just that both British and Argentine forces should get out of the Falkland Islands, but that they should get out of all islands and all oceans and all countries, including their own. The

Argentine forces have been fighting a war against their own population since they seized power six years ago. The British forces have been fighting wars against colonial populations all over the world ever since they began to seize the British Empire three centuries ago, and this fighting has been continued by Labour Governments as much as by Conservative Governments. War, as Randolph Bourne said at the end of the First World War, is the health of the State.

This is an unpopular message at this particular moment. But it must still be voiced, and it may even be heard when all the bills start coming in, when more British and Argentine bodies are taken home, when the taxes are raised to pay the hundreds of millions of pounds the War is costing, when the truth comes out about how our rulers blundered into the crisis and how they have behaved during it. The Suez War became one of the main factors in the revival of the libertarian Left twenty-five years ago. The Falklands War may do the same, but it will need a lot of hard work.
22nd May 1982

Wrapping It Up for God

God has been no more successful than man in settling the Falklands War. The priests have been as divided as the politicians, but like them have generally followed their own Governments.

Nearly half the Roman Catholics in the world live in Latin America, and the Catholic Church in Argentina — backed by those in the rest of Central and South America — has strongly supported not only the Argentine claim to, but the Argentine invasion of, the Falkland Islands. No doubt the same is true of the Catholics in Spain and Italy, which share the ancestors of the population of Argentina.

Meanwhile nearly all the Churches in Britain have supported the British Government in resisting the Argentine claim in deeds as well as in words. The Church of England has been predictably earning its position as the Established Church by defending the Christian doctrine of the Just War. This is designed in theory to justify only wars that are necessary, reasonable and moderate, but has been employed in practice to justify every war Christians have ever fought, including those fought between Christians. The

Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Runcie, who himself won a Military Cross during the Second World War, has gone so far as to say that it would have been wrong to turn the other cheek in the Falklands, contradicting an explicit teaching of Jesus in the Gospels.

Even the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume, has given his cautious support to the war. This endangers relations with Latin American and Continental European Catholics, which may not matter much, but also endangers relations with Rome, which matters a lot. God, working as usual in a mysterious way, arranged the Falklands War to coincide with the Pope's visit to Britain at the end of May. This is the first such visit by a reigning Pope, and it has already cost several million pounds to prepare. Could he visit a country which is at war with a Catholic country?

The Pope said that he might not come if there were serious fighting, but (probably will, finally did) come because of all the effort and money already invested in the visit. Before doing so he summoned Cardinals to Rome from both Argentina and Britain, and after doing so he may feel it necessary to visit Argentina too — and then presumably Chile as well, since it is also on the verge of war with Argentina. This could run and run.

Meanwhile the Pope arranged a mass with British and Argentine Cardinals, and appealed to the President of Argentina and the Prime Minister of Britain to stop the War. God, working in an even more mysterious way, promptly arranged the British counter-invasion of the Falklands Islands. Perhaps the real reason the Pope will have to come to Britain is that the extreme anti-Catholic Protestants have been praying that he won't do so, and that he can't let God take more notice of their prayers than his.

The Pope is making a 'pastoral' visit — that is, he is coming not as the head of a State or a Government but as the head of a (indeed, the) Church to feed his Catholic flock in Britain, much as he did in the United States three years ago. (Incidentally, it is odd that Jesus and his various human representatives should describe themselves as shepherds; of course shepherds care for their sheep, but only in order to fleece and eat them more efficiently afterwards). So he will be not just showing himself to the public and the media, and leading some religious services, but also delivering some messages. What (can, did) he say?

Pope John Paul II is the first Polish Pope, and the first non-Italian Pope for four centuries. He has been treated as a charismatic figure on his various visits to various parts of the world, but these have nearly all been to Catholic countries. The exception was the

United States, which has a strong political and social tradition of anti-Catholicism. There he insisted on maintaining the conventional hard line on the priesthood (no priests allowed to leave their orders, no married priests, no women priests, no nuns and monks in ordinary clothes) and on personal morality (no fornication or adultery, no contraception or abortion, no divorce, no homosexuality, no euthanasia or suicide). There was little overt opposition to his visit, but his message was covertly ignored.

In Britain his position is more delicate. In the sixteenth century Catholicism was repudiated, after more than a thousand years. The Catholic Church was virtually outlawed for three centuries, and is still thought to be somehow un-British — half Italian and half Irish. The Pope excommunicated and deposed Queen Elizabeth I in 1570, and that sentence has never been repealed. The United States did have a Catholic President in the end, but it is illegal for Britain to have a Catholic Monarch and it is unlikely to have a Catholic Prime Minister for a long time. Again, there is little overt opposition to his visit, except from some extreme Protestants and militant secularists (especially the National Secular Society and the Gay Humanists), but his message will be equally ignored. A call for peace in the Falklands will carry no more weight here than in Rome, and will only embarrass British Catholics.

So God has really made rather a mess of things this spring, and made himself look even sillier than he already did. No wonder more than half the population of Britain now never attends any religious ceremony at all. Yet some religious organisations have taken an unequivocal position against the war. The Society of Friends (Quakers) immediately repeated its traditional pacifist line. The United Reformed Church (a coalition of the old Puritan denominations of Presbyterians and Congregationalists) and the Methodist Church have condemned the fighting not so much on pacifist as on practical grounds. Even so, one can't help being reminded of the poem of the First World War:

God heard the embattled nations sing and shout
 'Gott strafe England!' and 'God save the King!'
 God this, God that, and God the other thing —
 'Good God', said God, 'I've got my work cut out'.

29th May 1982

M.H.

Oh What a Lovely Conventional War

Without for one moment forgetting that the introduction of nuclear power into warfare (by the democratic Allies, at the end of World War Two) effectively introduced a new dimension in genocide, it seems to be time to bring to the attention of those who protest only against nuclear weapons that there has been just a little bit of progress in the destructive capacity of weapons which are referred to as 'conventional'.

The most deadly ones seem to be British made and already sold to the Argentinian State — and very sophisticated weapons they are too. As befits a country which prides itself on the quality of the goods we offer the world in our export drives (for a century we have lived with the phrase 'Export or Die'), such as Rolls Royce cars and the beautifully tailored products of Savile Row, we are now one of the world's leaders in the export of the most highly developed technology for burning people alive.

It so happens that at the present time, practically the only thriving industry in this country is the arms industry. It is certainly the only one which the Government is prepared to support against the recession. In any other industry, if a factory is not economically solvent — if it's a 'lame duck' — then let it sink or swim. The building industry is in the doldrums, the clothing industry facing disaster and farming, thanks to EEC price rigging, facing yet another bitter struggle. In other words, food, clothing and shelter — the three fundamentals for existence — are facing bankruptcies, but shipbuilding yards that make warships, and ordnance factories that make missiles, and the electronics industry which provides the sophisticated hardware are being given Government contracts for products that, up until last month, nobody thought would ever be needed.

The needs of our streamlined forces — the Professionals that stand between us and the Red Menace — are provided in part out of the enormous profits made from the sales of our sophisticated body-burning machinery to other States. When the decision was taken (in view of our reduced imperial role!) to stop production of large aircraft carriers, rather than let the shipyards fall idle production was switched to destroyers for the Home Fleet.

There was no great urgency, new technology was coming along all the time, and the real concern was to keep the shipyards open, so wages were going up all the time too. The first of the new

destroyer class — Type 42 — was HMS Sheffield, and you all know where she is now. The cost of the Sheffield was nearly 60 per cent more than the original estimate; the cost of the second new ship (a Type 21 frigate, HMS Amazon) was more than twice the original price — but it looked like coming right in the end because the order for the next Type 42 destroyer to come off the line came in from Argentina. Unfortunately, this had not been completely paid for when the unpleasantness broke out, and some London banks are still owed about £6 million on the money they lent the tinpot fascist junta to buy that splendid British ship.

As far as Vickers, Vosper Thornycroft, Yarrow, or Swan Hunter are concerned, this hardware is for selling, and it's for selling to anybody. Anybody in the market, that is. The main arms producing countries in the world at the moment are the USA, the USSR, Britain and France, more or less in that order, with countries like Israel (a billion dollars a year in 1977!) and Germany (eh?) coming along nicely, too. The four main dealers in death pretend, irrespective of political alignments, to respect each other's markets, but in fact cut each other's throats wherever possible. Hence, when the USA, in an outburst of morality, put an embargo on selling arms to Latin America — where every military dictatorship wanted the very best for killing its own people and whatever territorial squabble it would get involved in — it opened the door for Britain and France. In fact the Type 42 destroyer sold to Argentina was followed by a second — manufactured there under licence with parts supplied from the UK.

The USA policy was reversed by President Nixon in 1973 when he yielded to pressure from the US arms manufacturers and allowed Tiger fighters to be sold to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru.

President Carter brought back some morality and put embargos on those sales — enabling the Soviet Union to get some of the trade — and also a ban on sales to South Africa, half-heartedly supported by 'our' Labour Government.

President Reagan, a monetarist and free-enterprise champion like Margaret Thatcher, has lifted the ban — which of course never existed as far as Maggie was concerned, for Britain, it seems, will sell arms to anybody, the excuse being — as it is for all traders — that the export orders finance Britain's own 'needs'.

Perhaps the most shadowy figure in this shabby trade is the Soviet Union. With the whole Warsaw Pact empire to supply (of which Czechoslovakia, for one, is itself a massive arms producer),

and to keep updated, with its totalitarian control of its own economy and its paranoid fear of any of its precious secrets slipping out, it may seem that Russia would not be too pushy in the arms trade. But there is so much more to it than that.

Arms can bring influence, or they can quite simply be a cynical bargaining point — or they can buy commodities desperately needed by the manufacturing State. The astonishing thing about the Russian economy is that it is short of food — but it is not so long ago that the Ukraine was referred to as 'the breadbasket of Europe'.

It seems quite obvious that the Ukrainian peasants have never forgiven the Kremlin either for Stalin's war against them in the 1930s or Khrushchev's vengeful purges after the war, and they have never accepted the enforced centralised collectivism laid upon them by the Bolsheviks. (Compare the totally different attitude of the Spanish peasants, who freely collectivised the land in 1936 under their own free communal control and rapidly increased production over the three years their revolution lasted).

Whatever the reason, however, the fact is that every year Russia has to go shopping for wheat all around the world — which effectively means the wheat-rich lands of the Americas, where their purchases push up the price for poorer countries. After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the USA embargoed sales of wheat and the USSR went south to Argentina, where they found the right-wing junta quite ready to sell wheat — but at an inflated price, and not willing to barter goods other than arms.

Back in the good ole USA, the farmers are lobbying Reagan to let them sell their massive surpluses of wheat to Russia, and for their part the Russians would rather keep in with the wealthy USA than get tangled with the sweaty politics of Latin America — all of which explains why the USSR has played it so cool during the last few weeks. You would have thought, wouldn't you, that they would have snatched the chance to get in with Argentina as soon as America came out in open support of Britain? But the uneasy old men in the Kremlin have always played a waiting game — besides which there's all those billions of dollars in loans to Poland to think about, as well as all the other Comecon trade . . . Nevertheless, the Russians must have food, and if it really has to come down to Mig fighters for wheat, that's what it will be.

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