

Murder on Seal Island

Falklands/Malvinas Hoax

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Introductory Note: Is it the war of the Malvinas or the fight for the Falklands? It all depends upon which imperialist gang you support, the doddering Great Britain or the budding young Argentina. But what if you support neither of these positions? What if you refuse to accept the “legitimacy” of the nation state, whether it be Democratic, Fascist, Communist, Monarchist, etc., let alone its global conflicts?

To us there is no choice, let alone a reason to choose. All governments, regardless of their reasons of existence, are the absolute antithesis of liberty, equality, fraternity and freedom. For this reason, we have decided to use a name that seems much more representative of the island being contested—Seal Island. Not to be confused with the barren rocks off the east coast of Florida that bear the same name, Seal Island was a term that whalers and hunters used to describe its furry, seal-covered beaches (this term was also used to include the islands of South Georgia and South Orkney, although the name will not extend to these isles in the following article). Since these animals seem to be the only true inhabitants of the island—no trace of an indigenous people has ever been found—to us the title Seal Island is a just one.

As we go to press, there are daily reports of Argentine and British troops murdering each other on a bleak bit of rock in the South Atlantic. As if knowledge of all history dating before April 2, 1982 does not exist, groups of humans stand ready to die while both nations justify their acts in the name of “honor, sovereignty, and freedom,” both claiming the sanctification of the same god.

I’m sure that, like myself, until a month or so ago most people would have been hard-pressed to come up with the location of Seal Island. That is, until it became the proving ground for not only the latest in modern weaponry (its reliability had to be tested somewhere), but the utmost of insanity.

Located off the eastern coast of Argentina, Seal Island is hardly what one could call choice land. Covered by clouds and rain 250 days out of the year, the island is a treeless, windswept mound that’s separated into two sections, East and West, by the Falkland [sic] Sound (it’s said that the islanders stand on an angle from force of habit and except for the occasional house and shed, rocks are its largest inhabitants). With the only indigenous dwellers of the island being seals and penguins, the islands remained a rather tranquil place for thousands of years. However, as it has been said many times before, all good things must come to an end. In a matter of a few generations this history of tranquility was turned into one of continuous murder and plunder. Transformed into a history of warfare that first pitted Europeans against seals (a rather one-sided fight to say the least), and after the near extinction of the “natives,” it was only a matter of time before the humans turned on themselves.

Discovered and Rediscovered

There's a great deal of debate, which I'll only touch upon, as to which European navigator first caught sight of the isle-Spanish, English, Italian (Florentine to be exact), or Dutch. Whoever it was, no one seemed to really care until it was recognized that the island was covered with gold. Not the metal, but the fish, whales and seals that could be traded for metal and power.

The first settlers arrived from France in 1774, led by Louis Antoine de Bouganville, and set up shop on the eastern half. It's hard to say whether Bouganville and friends were there in search of riches, but it's obvious that the Spanish, who forced the French off the island only two years after their arrival, knew that the island would play a large part in their plundering of the New World. The Spanish knew all too well that the Strait of Magellan was the doorway to the gold and raw materials that lay on the western side of South America and that it was the passageway to the long sought after Far East

Enter Britain

For the declining Spanish Empire, placing a fort on the eastern half of the island was a last chance move to keep its hands on the New World. But Spain's main contender at colonial rape and plunder, Great Britain, also espied the island's importance. Under the command of Commodore Jack "Foul Weather" Byron, the Crown established a military settlement towards the end of 1775 on the western side of Seal Island. Neither of the two groups knew of the other's existence, perhaps because of the continual driving rain, lack of communication (the two countries were not known for their warm feelings of friendship) or a combination of both. Whatever it was, when they both reached the shocking realization that they weren't alone, there was only one recourse-war! Well, almost. After both sides massed their naval fleets for a show-down in the choppy waters of the South Atlantic, the British backed off and removed their settlement in 1771 and left the Spanish to it. That is, until Spain gave them up, along with the then independent United Provinces of La Plata (Argentina), in 1811. Once again, tranquility returned, although the island's wildlife had not gone unnoticed.

With the continuous growth of industry in Europe and the still-young United States of America came heavy demands for fine machine oil-oil which, for the most part, was only found in the bodies of whales in the North Atlantic, and had, until that time, been extracted at heavy costs to these behemoths. Realizing the monetary potential of the whales around Seal Island (and noticing the increasing demands of the upper classes for seal fur), a quick thinking entrepreneur from Germany, Louis Vernet, was granted governorship of the islands by Argentina in 1829, along with all the seal and fishing "rights" in the area. That was until Vernet seized a United States sealing vessel in 1831, for "illegally" hunting on the islands.

Enter the United States

This marked not only the end of Vernet's governorship, but the beginning of the U.S. and British collusion on making certain that Argentina's claims to the island be completely suppressed. Most accounts of the Seal Island, either knowingly or unknowingly—I suspect the former—support the U.S. and British version of this history. That is, that Britain sent a task force out to the islands and, claiming sovereignty, evicted Vernet's settlement and colonized the island. In reality, it was the United States that mustered the task force, headed by the warship Lexington, and sailed off to destroy the Argentine settlement in 1832. But with strife and civil war at home, the Argentines weren't about to engage in a war with the U.S. and decided it was best to forget about Vernet and the island for the time being.

England Never Forgets

Always ready to fill a vacuum, especially when there's money involved, the British armed forces occupied Seal Island in 1833 and, true to the dictates of imperialism, the blood did flow.

Incorporating the South Sandwich Islands, South Orkney Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula (650,000 sq. miles of the Antarctic, to which Argentina also lays claim), under the administration of Seal Island (called the "Falkland Administration Centre and Dependencies" by the British), the British government allowed various countries to wage a murderous war on the whales and seals in the area with the Falkland Island Company, which had been given complete control over the islands, extracting large duties which were divided between the company and the Empire.

From the time of Vernet's governorship and until the end of the 19th century, the islands, especially S. Georgia, were converted from what Capt. James Cook described as "fabulous, fur-coated beaches" in 1775, to barren waste lands where the seal was all but extinct. At its peak, the sealing industry had reached the point of taking one million skins annually. Not content with turning the beaches red with blood, these newly-implanted Europeans turned to the open seas for fresh game.

From 1904 until the onset of World War II in 1939, 120,000 whales, half of all the whales caught in the world, lost their lives to the South Seas harpoon, insuring that the industrial world could keep its machines and weapons well oiled. In a rather macabre sense, it was the wholesale slaughter of these giants of the deep which made it possible for governments to organize the murder of millions of people during World Wars I and II. What goes around, comes around.

(As an aside, it's interesting to note that towards the end of this whaling boom, the British government became concerned over the dwindling sightings of whales. Not for ecological reasons, although there might have been a pinch of that in there somewhere, but because they feared the extinction of profits. To combat this problem, they tried to impose not a limit on whaling, but rather a ruling that every part of the animal must be used and that it must be processed on South Georgia, insuring the continued payment of duties. In response, Norwegian whaling companies devised the idea of the "factory ship"-a ship which allows whales to be "processed" at sea and makes the verification of the amount of whales killed impossible. Competition means progress.)

The Greatest Show On Earth

But where does this leave us? For many people, the recent Seal Island crisis is no different than some important sports match, with the spectators arguing over which team is better prepared for the game while they add up the day's wins and losses on both sides. And for "first-hand, up-to-date" reporting on the two teams, one can always turn to the TV news, which will not only bring you first-hand reports on the day's play, but will give an inside analysis of each team's potential via satellite as well. But this home team (home being either the latin or anglo parts of the world), propaganda never attempts to answer the question: Why are there thousands of soldiers on this island, all with itchy trigger fingers and dreams of glory? There are very few seals left to kill and rarely do islanders catch sight of a whale, yet two nations of different culture and language, located at opposite ends of the Earth are poised ready to once again turn the island's beaches red with blood.

Perhaps both countries want the oil that may be located offshore and on the disputed Antarctic Peninsula? Perhaps it's the sheep or the strategic location of Seal Island? Or could Great Britain be afraid of losing its Space Research Station, a station that is located on the island and is used for receiving satellite transmissions and for tracking of both "friendly" and "hostile" space probes? And of course, there's always that obscure concept of "honor."

And what about the United States and the Soviet Union? Why have they both shown more than a little interest in this war of buffoons? For the USSR, the chance of becoming closer allies with Argentina (they already rely on Argentina to supply a large part of their wheat imports), would not only put them that much nearer to the vast, untapped resources of South America, but could also insure their warships a safe passage around Cape Horn. For both nations, perhaps the prospect of a possible naval or submarine base in the South Atlantic, something that neither of them has, is quite alluring. Lacking a sufficient number of submarine "home bases," it's possible for the

Soviet Union to have only 15 to 20 percent of its sub fleet out of port at any one time, while the U.S., with more “home bases,” can deploy 65% of its fleet. A port in the South Atlantic would increase the at-sea percentage of either fleet, especially when one considers the extended traveling distances of the new Delta (USSR) and Trident (USA) class nuclear subs.

All of these questions, though, are things we can only speculate about since not only do governments not function logically during times of war, but the military activities of any nation state are open to neither “democratic” discussion nor debate. One cannot vote for or against the military, just as one cannot decide at the ballot box as to whether or not the state should exist. The state has never and shall never willingly renounce its “legitimacy” to power, its secrecy and its “right” to wage war.

Truth—The First Casualty

But there are some things that we do know. While this modern day version of bread and circuses is temporarily taking some British and Argentine minds off of the economic and social hardships at home (shortly before the outbreak of fighting between the two nations, Argentina saw some of the most violent demonstrations against the ruling junta and rioters burnt cities from one end of the country to the other in Britain), it is not a war against imperialism, as so many leftists have attempted to portray it. It is impossible for any country to exist outside the two economic spheres of influence that are controlled by the major imperialist leaders, the Soviet Union and the United States. It’s obvious from the latest war, the weapons used, and the economic sanctions that have been applied, just how true this statement is. And although no one should have to be convinced of the imperialist nature of Great Britain, it seems ridiculous to me that people cannot see the same aspirations on the part of an expanding Argentina. Does anyone really believe that Argentina’s relationship to Seal Island would be any different, except for changing a few laws, the national language, and informing motorists that they must now drive on the right side instead of the left side of the road?!

Also, this is not a fight for freedom or honor. We need not go into the history of the Argentine junta since it assumed power in 1976. The murder of over 30,000 Argentines either by or with the sanction of that country’s military and police is sufficient proof of the junta’s dedication to these concepts. But what about Britain?

Prime Minister Thatcher has told the world that British marines will bring back “freedom” to the islands and “liberate” its “British subjects.” The May 23, 1982 issue of the English newspaper *The Sun*, shows a picture of happy “kelpers”—the name given to the island’s inhabitants—and a British Commando “liberator,” while the paper announces: “Cuppa For A Para” (translation: cup of tea for a paratrooper). But the problem here is that, regardless of Thatcher’s and British news media’s war rhetoric, these happy “kelpers” are not British citizens and are not allowed to be so. In fact, they are called “kelpers” so as to differentiate them from the “true” British who are either military personnel, scientists, or administrators for either the British government or the Falkland Island Company, which essentially owns the island and its “kelpers” lock, stock and barrel!

Certainly many of you have seen the photographs that appeared during the first days of this recent crisis, of happy islanders waving victory signs as they left planes in London, but you can bet that very few of them, if any, were “kelpers.” They have essentially been trapped on the island since, not being considered British citizens, they have no Right to Abode in the United Kingdom. In fact, they are only allowed to visit the “mother country” once every two years, even though their lineage is directly traceable to Britain (there are a few “kelpers” in Britain at the moment, and the government said that they would “allow” them to stay there for the “duration”).

Being descendants of Scotland, the first “kelpers” traveled to the Seal Island not because of their pioneering spirit, but because of poverty and oppression at home. Just as Gen. Julio A. Roca, during the 1880s, eradicated the Araucanian Indians to obtain more grazing land for Argentine cattle, so did the British, almost a century before, destroy the Celtic clans of Scotland to obtain pasture land for sheep. Systematically destroying Gaelic culture by the torch and sword, the expanding British industrial empire forced these clansfolk into an existence of severe poverty. For many the only chance of escape was to enter one of the growing factory towns like Glasgow or to become kelp harvesters for the expanding fertilizer industries on the Scottish isles of Mull, Raasay, Sky, Mingulay and Tiree, or Seal Island in the South Atlantic. Either north or south, their lives were the same.

The “kelpers” who live on Seal Island probably find their living standards to be much better than that of their ancestors, but they are still second rate “subjects” in the eyes of the British government. Even if the British come out as the “glorious victors” of this murderous war, the “kelpers” still won’t be able to own the houses they live in or the stores they shop at, the Falkland Island Company does not allow it. Nor will they be able to secure “better” jobs with the company, since you have to be second generation British’ to do that, and the same goes for those “kelpers” who might harbor the silly dreams of spending the last years of their lives in Scotland -according to the recent Nationalities Act. So where is this much sought after honor and freedom that these professional killers are to restore to the islands?

(Another interesting aside is that although Britain claims to be waging this war because, as in the words of former Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, “The invasion of the Falkland (sic) Islands has been a humiliating affront to this country,” the government had until April 2, lost almost all interest in the island’s inhabitants. In 1972, Great Britain signed an accord with Argentina, handing over to that country all of the responsibilities of building roads and airstrips, providing medical care, organizing a postal system, equipping the island with teachers, and delivering all of the island’s heating fuel. They also suggested paying the “kelpers” \$14,000 to relocate-but not in the U.K.)

But the point here is to show that this most recent crisis on Seal Island is not an isolated case which is separated from the history of the rest of the world. Its history goes beyond its borders and the language of its inhabitants. It is a history that is directly related to those of Europe, North America, South America and Asia and which is, for the time being, a history that will continue along the same lines no matter who “wins” the war.

The point here is to show that in many ways, the relatively short and totalitarian history of Argentina parallels that of every nation state. Are the murderous actions of the junta that much different from Great Britain’s systematic elimination of the Celts in Scotland and their continuous war of occupation that is, at this very moment, being carried out on the Celtic descendants in Ireland? Not to mention the hundreds of other places around the globe that the Empire has conquered and destroyed? Is it any different from any of the states that are interested in Seal Island? Any different from the mass murders that have been brought upon the peoples of the Soviet Union and the many nations it controls? Murders committed under the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” in the name of the “worker’s state”? And is it really that much different from the slavery of Africans and the wars against the Indians that were carried out in this country, along with all the murderous activities-in the name of “freedom”-of the U.S. government in Vietnam, El Salvador, Guatemala, Brazil, Iran, Chile and on and on and on? In short, do the absolutely inhuman activities of the Argentine junta diverge that radically from the histories, both past and present, of the so-called “civilized” states, of any state? I think not.

There is also a point here that is not so evident. Although the plans and orders to systematically liquidate human and animal life on this planet are given by the Thatchers and Galtieris of the world, to say that they are the reason and authority behind it is to give them a power they do not possess. It is the “ordinary citizens” that give the ramblings of mad men and women the power of authority. It is the ‘ soldiers and the “ordinary citizens” that make up their ranks, with their blind power and willingness to obey that gives these administrators of the final solution any authority at all. Only in those who execute the orders does lie the power, authority to the laws of modern society, internalized into our very being, physically, intellectually and morally. The “ordinary citizen” who lives, breathes and finally acts on the internalized laws of modern society is the true carrier of authority and it is against this internalization that we must rebel.

* NOTE: Strangely enough, the May 3, 1982 issue of Newsweek magazine gave an interesting insight to the functionings of the Falkland Island Company: “Few economic benefits from the Falkland Islands Co. have ever flowed back to the “kelpers”.. From 1970 to 1974, fully 96 percent of the company’s profits were distributed to the British shareholders, One result has been a continuing drop in the Falklands’ population-from a peak of 2,392 in 1931 to about 1,800 today. Many of the kelpers have emigrated, forcing the company to import contract laborers who now Make up one-quarter of the islands’ farming population.

The kelpers who do choose to stay-mainly farm managers and sheep shearers- earn wages of \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year. A Falklander can spend his working life in a company-owned house eating free company-

supplied mutton at three meals a day. Company banks handle their accounts, and the company shipping line imports everything from marmalade to Land Rovers. But the firm can be a harsh overlord to its crofters. Retirees must surrender most benefits, and many end up virtually penniless”

Text box

“They acted in the best traditions of the British marines. They inflicted casualties, but suffered none themselves.”

—Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Great Britain

“While the junta governs, I kill.”

—General Luciano Benjamin Menendez, Governor and leader of the Argentine troops on Seal Island

“As a military man, if my job is to blow people’s heads off, I’ll do it in the most efficient and effective way I have to.”

—Rear Adm. John “Sandy” Woodward, commander of the British fleet at Seal Island

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