

EDITORIAL

Looking Beyond Port Stanley

Now that the battle for the Falkland Islands has been concluded, it is time to take stock. What has this little war in the South Atlantic signified?

Mrs. Thatcher has stated that a principle is at stake: aggression should not be allowed to succeed. She has gone on to assert that there are other countries waiting to settle boundary disputes with their neighbours by force of arms, and that they will be encouraged to take a chance if Argentina gets away with its invasion of the Falklands. Mrs. Thatcher may be thinking specifically about Gibraltar, but the problem is especially acute in Latin America. And she is warning those who stand to lose territory that, if they approve of Argentine aggression now, they can expect no redress from the international community when it comes their turn to be the victim. Moreover, the British ambassadors in Washington and New York, and Mr. Francis Pym, the British Foreign Secretary, have pointed out that self-determination would be denied the Falkland Islanders if they were bequeathed to the Argentine by Britain against their will. Indeed, nearer home, the British Government rests its case in Northern Ireland on the same principle. It has clearly stated, many times, that Northern Ireland may join Eire if and when a majority of its people wish it. Self-determination is a cornerstone of the United Nations Charter.

The trendy Left, whose flexibility may charitably be described as spineless, had no difficulty in justifying the Argentine invasion by calling the Falklands a vestigial nineteenth century colony and the islanders a collection of crofters and absentee lairds. Thus, a recently-reviled fascist-police regime, which makes war on its own people, was placed above the so-called "imperialists" in the Marxist pecking order. Cuba and Nicaragua, hardly to be numbered among the likely friends of Argentina, have offered their assistance. What price principle among the groups that the Soviet ideological warriors call "useful idiots"?

But principle is precisely what this little war has been about. The most significant point about this whole affair is that the Argentine junta, who deride such bourgeois hang-ups as fighting on behalf of kith and kin on the other side of the world at considerable cost, have been caught by misjudging the British determination to stand and fight on principle. They are not alone; one can trace through the Canadian media the same kind of disbelief that the game was worth playing. When will the British give in? Will they concede when they have lost 500 men? Perhaps when they lose ten ships? Shades of Chamberlain have emerged from the graveyards in these questions, which amount to saying that since the Falklands are a far away place of which we know nothing, it is not possible to justify the effort to retake them. The *Manchester Guardian*, never renowned for its guts, spoke for the defeated in spirit. It agreed with sending the fleet but shrank from using it. The Irish joined the ranks of the neutrals again. They have a perfect right to do so but let them not expect to be applauded for it. The Europeans probably secured their pound of flesh over the Common Agricultural Policy, but they stood firm behind Britain when her ground

forces started reducing the Argentine garrison. The French, one beady eye on St. Pierre and Miquelon, were early in their condemnation of aggression. The Americans, forced to choose between their friends in Europe and the mixed bag of questionable regimes which is laughingly called the Organization of American States, chose the former. They may well find at the end of the road that there is one less military regime in South America thanks to British determination. No doubt the trendy Left will turn itself inside out again when that happens.

What is interesting in this exercise is the Soviet view of it. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union does not follow principle nor does it encourage principled thinking in its people. If it did it would be out on its ear tomorrow. It believes that everyone has his price. Pay some and frighten others is its motto. Soviet leaders do not believe in communism any more and nor do the Soviet people. The only thing that matters in the Soviet Union is looking after Number One. So when their own dissenters start quoting principle and, horror of horrors, actually suffering for their principles, it is time for Soviet leaders to prepare for trouble. Principled people who live, and are prepared to die, for principle cannot be bought or frightened. Worse, they are unpredictable. And if there is one thing the Soviets really fear it is unpredictable people, unpredictable states and unpredictable events.

So, what the British did about the Falklands and were still doing at the time of writing, was not only a nasty surprise to the Argentines but also to the Soviets. The Soviets are always taking the temperature of their opponents and they quickly record any loss of nerve of which they can take advantage. Divided counsels over an affair like the Falklands marks the sheep from the goats. We can be sure that those who have been so easily separated from the group will receive solicitations from the Bear in the future. Neutrality may not be an acceptable stance in the Soviet bloc but it is praiseworthy when it is adopted by Western states.

There is a post-script to this message. It is that peace depends on not making miscalculations like that of the Argentines. Hitler mistook British intentions when he invaded Poland. After all there was nothing practical and immediate that they could do about it. A previous generation misunderstood the British in 1914. Then, and in 1939, the Germans blamed the British for declaring war and pursuing it regardless of cost. It is really no good blaming the British for the Argentine miscalculation today. But we may observe how important it is to make abundantly clear — by occasional sharp lessons like this and by maintaining the public will to act — what an aggressor should expect as the outcome of his acts. Now look at the activities of those who would dismantle the odious system of nuclear deterrence. Odious it may be, but it is real and certain and, therefore, is not likely to be tested by the Soviets — so long as it is unambiguous. The nuclear disarmament movement, however, is creating a fog of doubt around the nuclear deterrent. They should be reminded that a European war would be quite another matter from that in the South Atlantic. But peace in Europe, as in the South Atlantic, will depend on there being no doubt at all about the consequences of aggression.