

NEW GOVERNOR – HOA 27 SEPTEMBER 2006

Your Excellency,

In rising to welcome you as leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition it gives me particular pleasure to do so because in you we have once again a military appointment by Her Majesty in her choice of a Governor for Gibraltar.

Without wanting to be disrespectful to or questioning the commitment of your Excellency's civilian predecessors, I have always made clear our preference on this side of the Parliament for a military governor. Indeed I did when I welcomed them here on their arrival. I said so upfront, as is my wont.

Your Excellency, the history of our homeland is so intertwined with the military history of Great Britain that no person with a military career and background can be unaware of the part Gibraltar has played and the many thousands of British lives that were given up in its defence on the many occasions that Spain tried to take it back by force and that this inevitably makes military governors our allies in keeping Spain at bay.

Gibraltar is unlike other colonies in that its people were not conquered by the English in 1704. We came after, in my family line, for example, the first of us was here before 1748, and no doubt making a nuisance of himself to the establishment, as some believe that I have always done.

Because we are the descendents of those that sought protection under the British Flag and the British Crown, we have over 300 years developed a special affection for and loyalty to that

relationship and we want it to stay that way. Spain has been defeated in its futile military attempts to retake the Rock many years ago by soldiers like Your Excellency and volunteer forces of Genoese immigrants like my ancestors. Fifty two years ago it gave up its military attempts and instead mounted a diplomatic and economic offensive, following Her Majesty's last visit to our homeland. This began by depriving those of her people who were not already working here from entering from 1954. Since then we have been the recipients of a campaign to conquer us by bending our will and undermining our resistance through sanctions which reached their peak in a total blockade and have since been periodically relaxed in stages since 1982, with something being given in exchange, for each stage of the relaxation of the blockade.

Since 1954 the role of Her Majesty's aptly named, Foreign Office, has been to give unsolicited advice to Spain to drop the sanctions and woo the Gibraltarians instead, so as to improve their chances

of success. I must say I have in all my years in public life been totally mystified as to why the Foreign Office sees its role as advising those who wish to deprive Her Majesty of part of her dominions, on how they can succeed.

Be that as it may, it provides an insight into recent developments. It seems that Spain has begun to listen to the advice and is adopting a new offensive to take Gibraltar.

First it was the stick, then it became the stick and the carrot, and now it seems it is going to be just the carrot, but as Your Excellency no doubt knows, there is no such thing as a free lunch. Nor even a lunch made up of carrots.

So we come to the present and the price that has been offered in Cordoba for this particular bunch of carrots. Here is where we part ways with the Government as to the reasonableness of the price.

We both agree that the removal of discriminatory anti Gibraltar sanctions should carry no price, but the Government argues that however morally correct that view may be. None the less, in the real world the baddies always win something and get rewarded, if one is to see them off.

There is an element of truth in this, but it is also true that if you stand your ground and do not budge you also sometimes win, and there are also many examples of that happening in the real world.

When it comes to the crunch, it all comes down to the exercise of the political judgment by the elected representatives of the people entrusted with the responsibility of Government. There are elements in the price offered by the present Government, which we would not have signed up to and which we will not deliver when we are Her Majesty's Government in Gibraltar because our people entrust us with that task as we hope they will.

Before the general election takes place, this House will have to decide on the holding of a referendum to decolonize Gibraltar.

The draft constitution that was approved by the House, as amended to meet UK's requirements, provides that level of self government which, in the judgement of the UK, is compatible with continued British sovereignty. Whilst we do not necessarily share this view, subject to persuading UK to go further, this is the position we have at the moment.

The UK accepts that the referendum on such a constitution will be an act of self-determination by the Gibraltarians.

According to the UN, self-determination means that the people of a colony decide the future status of their homeland. There can

therefore be no doubt as to what we are asking our people to do by voting in such a referendum.

Although Spain seems to believe that it has an undertaking from UK that this new constitution leaves Gibraltar's international status intact and that our decolonization by Spain recovering Gibraltar stays as a pending agenda. It remains to be seen what happens next week, when Gibraltar comes up at the UN and what the UK proposes to do about the consensus decision, the text of which is every year negotiated beforehand with Spain.

For our part, we are supporting the draft constitution on the basis that it is accepted by UK as the mode for decolonization that was provided by the UN decision of 1970.

On the question of the franchise, we are very clear that self-determination has to be exercised by the Gibraltarians who are the

colonized people and who enjoy that right because they are a distinct people with their own cultural identity and have a right to enjoy a full measure of self government.

The general election to which I have already referred will in the near future give our people the choice of competing policies on a range of issues, as it should do and as is the norm in the British parliamentary system of democracy which we have adopted as our own and of which we are so proud. In the exercise of this democratic choice there can be no question of prior constraints being introduced which would require those standing for election to honour undertakings given to Spain for fulfilment in 2008, except for those who have made such promises.

In the interim and before this happens, it would appear that events in the near future will indicate that Spain is content that it will have direct access to flights from our airport to Spanish destinations and

that it will have achieved the reversal of the UK decision to freeze the pensions of those former Spanish workers.

We have been told that in the so called “give and take” of the recent negotiations this, multi-million cash payment, is all the ‘take’ they are getting in exchange for the ‘give’ which is the relaxation and removal of some restrictions. However, the pending “take” due in 2008 in our view involves more and is designed to ensure that in effect flights to and from Spanish airports would, if and when full implementation takes place, become internal flights, with passengers being treated at the Spanish end as if they were **NOT** arriving from or departing to our country, as will be the case in the immediate future and as happens from any other British airport.

Clearly Your Excellency is going to be with us in interesting times. Though to be honest, I can not say I have actually known many dull moments in my 34 years in this chamber.

In the time that you are with us, we look to your Excellency to protect us from the alleged charm offensive of Spain as much as your predecessors would have protected us from their military offensive and also against the well meaning efforts of the Foreign Office in advising Spain how to take Gibraltar by stealth. We do so, let me hasten to add, not because we believe there is the remotest possibility that this will succeed, or fare better than the previous methodology, but because what we expect is that Your Excellency will be on the side of the people and defend what most Gibraltarians want, which is no diluting of our ties with UK and, most certainly, not an increase in Spain's influence.

On behalf of our side of this House and of the people of Gibraltar I
welcome you and your lady wife to our homeland and invite you
both to become part of our family.