

Self-Determination for Falklands but Nowhere Else in the Remaining British Empire

London denies constitutional powers to Afro-Caribbean population in the Turks and Caicos

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Britain is loudly proclaiming that the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands, the South Atlantic island group that is hotly contested between Britain and Argentina, voted 99.8 percent to remain an overseas territory of the United Kingdom. British Prime Minister David Cameron publicly rebuked the Argentine government and the new Pope, Francis I, for their support of Argentine sovereignty over the Falklands. As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio supported Argentina's historical claim to the islands.

If only Mr. Cameron were as dedicated to the wishes of the inhabitants of some of Britain's other far-flung and nearer -to-home territories as he is toward the "Kelpers," as the Falkland Islanders call themselves.

In the cases of the Turks and Caicos Islands and Anguilla in the Caribbean, the Tory-Liberal Democratic government in London has rolled back the self-government previously afforded the two island colonies.

The British government imposed direct rule on the Turks and Caicos in 2009, citing misrule and corruption by the island's then-premier, Michael Misick. Britain appointed a Commission of Inquiry led by Sir Robyn Auld that recommended direct rule of the islands from London through Governor Gordon Wetherell; his successor Ric Todd; Attorney General Huw Sheppard; and Chief Financial Officer Hugh McGarel Groves. The Commission of Inquiry was replaced by a Special Investigation and Prosecution Team (SIPT) that began investigating Turks and Caicos government officials for corruption.

The new Premier, Galmo Williams, declared, "Our country is being invaded and re-colonized by the United Kingdom, dismantling a duly elected government and legislature and replacing it with a one-man dictatorship, akin to that of the old Red China, all in the name of good governance."

The British neo-colonial government brought criminal charges against a dozen Turks and Caicos official, including five ministers in the Misick government, including Misick himself. The former premier fled to Brazil and was arrested pursuant to an extradition request from Britain. However, the breakdown in relations between London and Latin America over the Falklands issue may have compelled the Brazilian government to release Misick on bail awaiting a final determination on the extradition request.

Last November, an election was held in the Turks and Caicos and the Progressive National

Party of former Premier Misick barely eked out a victory in an 8 seat to 7 seat vote for the opposition People's Democratic Party in the House of Assembly. Dr. Rufus Ewing became Premier and among his first acts was to demand London restore constitutional powers from the abrogated constitution to the elected government and sack the governor, Attorney General, and other appointed officials. Cameron and Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary William Hague have resisted these calls. Essentially, when the white population and government of the Falklands demand something from London, they are heard and the request is positively acted upon. However, when it is an Afro-Caribbean population in the Turks and Caicos that makes a demand, they are ignored. It is the British colonial way.

In a letter to Hague, Ewing wrote that the investigation of the previous Misick government was a "farce, impregnated with cloak and dagger acts on the part of the Governor, AG Chambers and SIPT, to incarcerate Turks and Caicos Islanders at all costs, even the cost of the violation of the principles of justice and the human rights of individuals."

Ewing told a summit of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Port au Prince, Haiti, "We are today being governed by a constitution that was conceived in Whitehall, and was, for all intents and purposes, thrust upon the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, at a time when they were without representation." Ewing was referring to the 2011 Constitution that afforded the island less rights than the previous Constitution of 2006.

One of the main objectives of the London-appointed government was to impose a tax hike and austerity measures on the Turks and Caicos. Hague rejected Ewing's request and stated: "We expect the territories to meet the same high standards of good governance and public financial management as in the UK." That is rich coming from a British government that has been mired in financial and sexual scandal since it came to power. But, again, the rationale in London is based on the fact that when white ministers and Tory and Liberal Democratic MPs are engaged in scandal, it is a minor infraction, but when a government composed of people of color are accused of scandal, an unconstitutional, anti-democratic, neo-colonialist sacking of the entire government ensues.

It is clear that the Turks and Caicos wants to join its fellow CARICOM partners as an independent nation but London has thrown in a number of obstacles to full sovereignty. The Turks and Caicos are not alone in having neo-colonialism imposed on them from the halls of power along the banks of the Thames.

Britain, working with France, the Netherlands, the United States, Morocco, New Zealand, Canada, Israel, and Australia, has sought to diminish the role of the United Nations' Special Committee on Decolonization in speeding independence for the 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories recognized by the committee, which includes the Turks and Caicos and another Caribbean island where Britain has re-stamped its colonial imprimatur, Anguilla.

In the 1960s, Anguilla declared unilateral independence from the Federation of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla because it wanted to retain its ties to Britain and not shed them in favor of a colonial status within a West Indies mini-federation. However, after some forty years, things have started to change on the island. Britain, instead of allowing Anguilla more self-government under Anguilla Constitutional Order 1 April 1982, amended in 1990, has reversed course and started to retain and retake more powers for itself. This has resulted in more Anguillians bringing up the independence option decades after the Anguillan Revolutions of 1967 and 1969.

Britain is trying to eliminate a provision in the Anguillan Constitution that provides for an option of independence. It is clear that Britain is trying to do to Anguilla what the Netherlands did to the three small Caribbean island territories of Bonaire, Saba, and Saint Eustatius after the dissolution of the self-governing Netherlands Antilles, make Anguilla part of Britain and incorporate it into the United Kingdom and European Union. The Netherlands incorporated its three territories as municipalities of the Netherlands in a move that was not clearly explained to the residents of the islands.

Last year, Anguillan Chief Minister Hubert Hughes told the UN that his government “decided that the Anguilla people will have to decide whether they want to stay in slavery or go on to freedom.”

As with the Turks and Caicos, Britain has imposed economy-crippling austerity on Anguilla using the pretext that the island is rife with financial corruption.

As bad as the Turks and Caicos islanders and Anguillans are in being re-colonized by Britain, no people have suffered more than the Ilois of the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. In the 1960s, they were removed by Britain against their wishes and relocated to Mauritius where they live in squalor. Britain removed the islanders to make way for a U.S. nuclear weapons, intelligence, and, more recently, a gulag for detainees, on the island of Diego Garcia.

So, while Mr. Cameron lectures the Pope and Argentina on respecting the wishes of the Falkland Islanders, he continues to run roughshod over the wishes of the peoples of the Turks and Caicos, Anguilla, the Chagos Archipelago, and even those closer to home in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man, who would opt for independence if not for the heavy jackboot of British colonial rule...

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