

19 Feb 1969

Mr. Tebbit  
 Mr. Le Toca  
 Mr. Counsell  
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Defence Facilities in the Indian Ocean  
DIEGO GARCIA

A Mr. Tebbit has asked for an explanation of FCO telegram 28 to  
 B the High Commissioner, Port Louis, about Diego Garcia. Copies of  
 relevant telegrams are at B.

2. We have been informed by the Americans that the new administration wish to go ahead with a proposal (in abeyance since the Presidential ~~Election~~) to construct an "austere communications facility" on Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago in B.I.O.T. A  
 C background note on this proposal is submitted herewith. Congressional approval for this proposal will be sought towards the end of March by a classified Budget item which, however, may then leak and arrangements are therefore being made to inform the Indian and Mauritian Governments about the proposal confidentially 24 hours before it is laid before Congress.

3. The Americans have informed us that they will require the removal from Diego Garcia of the plantation labourers and their families now on the island. They total about 380. The alternatives are:-

a) to relocate them all on Paros Banhos and Salomon Islands (also in the Chagos Archipelago) where with the labour already there they would enable the plantations on those islands to be run as commercially profitable enterprises.

b) to "sterilize" the Archipelago by sending all the people at present in the three islands back to Mauritius and the Seychelles whence they came.

4. The arguments in support of these alternatives are finely balanced. Alternative a) possesses shortterm advantages but alternative b) is preferred in the long run because it will avoid the growth of a B.I.O.T. population (all children born in the islands after Nov. 1965 can claim B.I.O.T. citizenship and not Mauritius or Seychelles citizenship) and consequent U.N.O. problems. In assessing the relative arguments the attitude of the Mauritius Government to the

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enforced return of some 500 Ilois if alternative b) is adopted will be an important factor and this telegram seeks the High Commissioner's opinion about the Mauritian re-action. There would be no problem regarding the return to the Seychelles of the Seychellois now in the Chagos.

5. Since the creation of B.I.O.T. the plantations in the Chagos Archipelago have been run down with the result that there are already some 120 adult male Ilois plus their families now "on the beach" in Mauritius. The Mauritius Government have already made representations about them which we staved off by offering to permit their return - but in the event no transport offered. If alternative b) is adopted the Mauritius Government will expect us to accept, and we will be unable to escape, responsibility for the re-settlement of these people and any others like them.

6. When the arguments in support of both alternatives have been fully marshalled, the alternatives will be put to ministers for a decision.



UK decision wrong

*Eric Cunnell.*

(E. H. M. Counsell)  
East African Department,  
19 Feb 1969

*Good. On the face of it (b) seems preferable; but I shall look forward to seeing your considered view.*

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