

Lord SHACKLETON

file

OA

17/9



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

3 September 1986

Acyl

BF

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from Lord Shackleton about the Antarctic. I should be grateful for a draft reply.

I am copying this letter to Rob Smith (Department of Education and Science) and to Jill Rutter (Chief Secretary's Office).

(Charles Powell)

A. C. Galsworthy, Esq., C.M.G.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

086

The Rt. Hon. Lord Shackleton, KG, PC, OBE,
Enserch House,
8 St. James's Square,
London, SW1Y 4JU.
01-930 1752
01-930 8697



House of Lords

2nd September, 1986.

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London, S.W.1.

Dear Prime Minister

May I thank you very much for your letter regarding fishery zones in the vicinity of the Falklands. I would only say, if I may, that I am doubtful as to whether the FAO study will yield significant information which could lead to a meaningful agreement. Meanwhile I am very glad that we have taken a firm line with the Soviet Union and other countries.

May I however take this opportunity to say something about the Antarctic situation? I think you are aware that I have always seen the Falklands as a very significant element in regard to the future peace of the Antarctic and indeed vice versa. When Aubrey Buxton and I met you to talk about the Falklands we had some brief discussion on the Antarctic dimension and this I think may have influenced you in seeing representatives from British Antarctic Surveys and the subsequent grant of extra funds which enabled British Antarctic survey to develop their programmes.

How important this work is has recently been shown by the discovery of the "ozone hole" which forms over the Antarctic in early Spring. Analysis of ground-based measurements showed ozone amounts over the UK base at Halley to have diminished by 40% over a decade. The BAS findings stimulated a search through NASA satellite records by US workers, who confirmed the seasonal drop. This may be the first real evidence that atmospheric pollution is damaging the ozone layer. BAS is contributing to a major programme now being mounted by the US to examine the effect and its causes in more detail.

I could, of course, go at considerable length into the significance of the British Antarctic Survey research efforts. It is widely agreed that Britain is well up among the leaders, if not the leader, of the Antarctic scientific community.

However, I gather that there could be a change in the funding situation which could mean we would lose our eminently visible position. I would like to stress, as the recent Natural Environment Research Council visiting group made clear, that the scientific work of BAS contributes very much to British prestige - not I hasten to add that I am concerned with this point alone. It is important that our stance in all three of



House of Lords

- 2 -

the British territories in the South Atlantic should be coherent. We cannot risk being seen to be weak in one without possible effects on the others. The decline in the British Antarctic position could weaken our role in the South West Atlantic and although the Falklands is not of much significance at this stage as a base for Antarctic operations, the development of the new air field shows signs of altering this. I for one regard it as imperative that the Antarctic in this particular sector is not left to be battled over by Chile and Argentina, both of whom are actively committed, notwithstanding the Antarctic Treaty, to strengthening their territorial claims. I hope you will not think I am romancing when I say had it not been for your personal decision and authority in the re-taking of the Falkland Islands, President Galtieri might now have been pressing Antarctic claims which could indeed lead to conflict under a different regime than the present Argentine Government.

Perhaps I might conclude by observing that for over sixty years the Government has been involved in the Antarctic, and that during that time it has been understood that British interests are best pursued through scientifically productive activity in order to achieve broader political purposes.

yours sincerely
Iddie Shackleton

SHACKLETON