

THE CHILEAN FAILURE TO OBTAIN BRITISH RECOGNITION, 1823-1828

The year 1823 witnessed a significant modification of the attitude of the British Foreign Office toward Chile. Soon after coming into office in 1822 Canning took up the question of Hispanic America. He apparently believed it possible to gain Cabinet support for immediate recognition of the Hispanic American states. Confidently he offered mediation to Spain, but without result.

Many influences were at work to bring about closer Anglo-Chilean relations at this time. In June, 1818, Commodore Bowles of the Royal Navy wrote that the quantity of British trade with Chile made very desirable the appointment of a commercial agent in that country,¹ and suggestions of this type grew more frequent as time passed. In April, 1822, meetings were held by London merchants for the purpose of "maintaining" commercial intercourse with the Hispanic American nations,² and Liverpool shipowners and merchants petitioned for recognition of the independence of those countries.

Canning, supported by such evidence of public support, was able in 1823 to carry through the Cabinet his project

¹ Bowles to Admiralty, 7 June, 1818 (Public Record Office, Admiralty 1/23, N^o 84, secret); JOSÉ PACÍFICO OTERO, *Historia del libertador* (4 vols.; Buenos Aires, 1932), II, pp. 432-433.

² FREDERIC L. PAXSON, *The independence of the South American republics, a study in recognition and foreign policy* (Philadelphia, 1903), p. 203.

for the appointment of commercial agents to the South American republics. In October, 1823, he appointed Christopher Nugent consul general to Chile.³ Two vice-consuls were likewise named, Henry William Rouse and Matthew Carter. In the instructions to Nugent, Canning explained that no fees should be levied by him upon British trade and shipping in the ports of his consulate except such as were purely notarial. He was given provisionally a salary of two thousand pounds annually with liberal allowances for expenses. Later (15 December, 1823), Nugent was given a letter by Canning addressed to the "secretary" of the Chilean Government asking that every facility be given him in entering upon his duties. In mid-December, 1823, he and the vice-consuls sailed from London on the warship "Cambridge" which likewise carried British consular representatives to Lima, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo.⁴ He reached Valparaíso on 4 May, 1824, and entered upon his functions at Santiago, eleven days later.

In 1824 the British Foreign Secretary was able to carry further his efforts toward recognition. He converted the Cabinet to the recognition of Argentina, but difficulties between the governments of the provinces and that of Buenos Aires delayed for a time the final step. Late in 1824, however, recognition of Colombia and Mexico was decided upon; and in January, 1825, this intention was notified to the powers.

Reasons for not including Chile in the category of states to be recognized were several. On 24 November, 1823, Canning informed representatives in London of the Neo-Holy

³ George Canning to Christopher Nugent, 10 October, 1823 (F. O. 16/1); C. K. WEBSTER, *Britain and the independence of Latin America, 1812-1830; select documents from the Foreign Office archives* (2 vols.; London, 1938), I, N^o 163, p. 351.

⁴ WILLIAM HENRY KOEBEL, *British exploits in South America; a history of British activities* (New York, 1917), p. 240; DIEGO BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, (16 vols.; Santiago de Chile, 1884-1902), XIV, 369.

Alliance that he thought "republican principles" had taken too deep root in Buenos Aires and Colombia, but that there was yet time to strengthen monarchic and aristocratic principles in Peru, Mexico, and Chile.⁵ Although almost all Spanish troops had been driven from Chilean soil, Canning knew that Spanish authorities and soldiers yet remained on the Island of Chiloé.⁶ Apart from the fact that the type of government in Chile was not completely acceptable there was evidence of too much instability, too many changes of regime. This point was fundamental, for Canning was willing to recognize a republican government only if convinced of its stability. In the later part of 1825, Nugent explained to the Chilean Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and to the Supreme Director his government's position, stating that Canning would accept a "consolidated republic" of a centralist character or a government organized upon a federalist basis.⁷ Recognition, however, would be given only when the British Government was certain that political union in Chile was a fact.

Political rivalries between the Provinces of Concepción and Coquimbo and the Province of Santiago reported by Nugent to Canning at the end of October, 1825, further confirmed Canning in his belief that recognition of Chile at that time would be premature.⁸ Correspondence of the British Government was constantly interfered with, not by the Chilean Government, but by merchants and other in-

⁵ Neumann to Metternich, 7 February, 1824, *Berichte aus England*, quoted by HAROLD TEMPERLEY, *The foreign policy of Canning, 1822-1827. England, the Neo-Holy Alliance, and the New World* (London, 1925), p. 139.

⁶ George Canning to Sir William a Court, 31 March, 1824 (F. O. 72/284); WEBSTER, Vol. II, N° 555, p. 423.

⁷ Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 23 September, 1825, Valparaíso (F. O. 16/2); *ibid.*, Vol. I, N° I, N° 177, pp. 362-363.

⁸ Note of Canning on docket of Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 30 October, 1825, Santiago de Chile (F. O. 16/3); *ibid.*, pp. 364-365.

dividuals, against whom however, the Government took no action.⁹ Some doubt existed in Canning's mind whether British subjects in Chile enjoyed full civil privileges and exercise of unmolested religious worship.¹⁰ A final obstacle to British recognition was ignorance of developments in that country. This was the explanation given to the Spanish Foreign Minister for not including Chile within the group of states recognized in 1825.¹¹

The position thus taken by the British Foreign Secretary had run the gauntlet of not inconsiderable Parliamentary opposition. In the House of Lords the Marquis of Lansdowne attempted to force the Foreign Office into immediate action by moving an address to the King showing the expediency of recognition of all the Latin American nations. He assured the House of Lords that Chile's status was that of complete independence (15 March, 1824).¹² Three months later, Sir James Mackintosh, the Scottish publicist, stated in the House of Commons that not a "vestige of any party friendly to Spain" remained in Chile;¹³ he therefore suggested recognition. He spoke at the time of the presentation of a petition to the House of Commons signed by representatives of a number of important mercantile and financial houses for recognition of the independence of Colombia, Buenos Aires, and Chile. The petition, signed by representatives of Barings; Herrings, Powles and Co.; Goldsmith and Co.; Montefiori and Co.; and by Benjamin Shaw, chairman of Lloyd's Coffee House, stated that continual

⁹ Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 9 January, 1825, Valparaíso (F. O. 16/2); WEBSTER, Vol. I, N° 169, p. 357.

¹⁰ George Canning to Christopher Nugent, 23 April, 1824 (F. O. 16/1); *ibid.*, N° 165, pp. 352-353.

¹¹ George Canning to George Bosanquet, 31 December, 1824 (F. O. 72/288); *ibid.*, II, 430; TEMPERLEY, p. 150.

¹² Great Britain, *Parliamentary debates*, New Series, Vol. X (3 February-29 March, 1825), col. [975].

¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. XI (30 March-25 June, 1824), col. [1375].

delay produced the "most detrimental consequences" to their commercial transactions.¹⁴

In this general situation the successor of Antonio José de Irisarri, former Chilean Foreign Minister, then representing Chile in London, was appointed. Chilean governmental circles were at this time optimistic, almost credulously so, over the possibilities of early British recognition. Nugent reported to Canning in July, 1824, that Canning was "styled even in the Senate, by all the officers of the state, the redeemer of Chile."¹⁵ The Senate in February decided to attempt to secure the support of Great Britain and the United States by means of concessions to their commerce or by indemnification for their expenses in return for military defense of the new Latin American states.¹⁶ On 29 March, 1824, the Supreme Director promulgated a decree naming Mariano Egaña, then Foreign Minister, Irisarri's successor with the title "envoy [extraordinary] and minister plenipotentiary".¹⁷ Further evidence of Chilean belief in the probability of early recognition was the reaction to news of the celebrated Polignac Memorandum in which Canning, the British Foreign Secretary, declared himself in favor of Hispanic American independence.

Soon after arriving at Valparaíso, Nugent addressed the Chilean Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on the subject of Egaña's mission. He requested that the departure of Egaña be delayed and explained that his own arrival should not be construed as a tacit encouragement of the mission;¹⁸ thus he made clear that the attitude of his government toward Chile would not for the present undergo modifica-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, cols. [1393]-[1394].

¹⁵ Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 30 July, 1824, British Consulate, St. Iago (F. O. 16/1); WEBSTER, Vol. I, N° 167, pp. 355-356.

¹⁶ DIEGO BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, XIV, 361.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹⁸ Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 4 June, 1824, Valparaíso (F. O. 16/1); WEBSTER, Vol. I, N° 166, p. 353.

tion.¹⁹ Despite Nugent's intimations Egaña sailed from Valparaíso on 22 May, 1824, and reached England three months later (26 August, 1824).

His initial work in the British capital was complicated by difficulties with Irisarri. The latter refused to recognize the political change which resulted in O'Higgin's loss of power and consequently to admit the legality of Egaña's appointment. He retained the seals of his office and ordered his secretary, Andrés Bello, to remain at the "legation".²⁰ A confidant of Irisarri, Agustín Gutiérrez Moreno, actually sailed on the same ship as Egaña, but upon reaching Gravesend, by an abuse of confidence and as a result of the inexperience of two Chilean functionaries, he sent Egaña's baggage to Irisarri, who carefully went through all papers before Egaña had discovered his treachery.²¹ Because of the obstructiveness of Irisarri it was only with difficulty that he was able to gain possession of the part of the funds from the loan that yet remained in London. On 14 January, 1825, he delivered to Irisarri a summary order to return to Chile in the shortest possible time, and there to account for his conduct. In reply, Irisarri stated that his connection with the Government of Chile had already ceased.

Three objectives guided Egaña in his negotiations in London: securing of British recognition of Chilean independence, inquiry into a British loan to Chile of 1822, and dispatch of industrialists, teachers, and others to assist in the development of the country.

On 17 January, 1825, the Chilean agent requested of the British Foreign Secretary a public reception. The reply,

¹⁹ Heman Allen, United States minister to Chile, to John Quincy Adams, N° 3, 26 May, 1824, Santiago de Chile; United States Department of State Archives, "Diplomatic dispatches received, Chile," Vol. I.

²⁰ A. J. Irisarri to Andrés Bello, 27 August, 1824, London; GUILLERMO FELIÚ CRUZ, "Bello, Irisarri y Egaña en Londres", *Revista chilena de historia y geografía*, LIV, (julio-septiembre de 1927), N° 58, pp. 230-231.

²¹ BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, XIV, 520.

however, was given that such an action could only follow direct recognition of Egaña's diplomatic character,²² which clearly was not contemplated at that time. Canning let it be known, however, as in the case of Irisarri, that he would be ready to receive the representative of Chile as an individual for the purpose of communicating information in regard to developments in that country. It was not, however, until 21 May that Egaña was received by Canning. Egaña early in the conversation was surprised by the extent of the Secretary's knowledge of recent Chilean developments.²³ When the Chilean representative raised the fundamental issue of recognition, Canning reaffirmed recent British policy, stating that more time was required to learn what form of government would prevail in the country and remarking that Chile did not yet seem to be stably organized.²⁴

For a time the Chilean Government continued to be optimistic over the prospects of immediate British recognition. In a proclamation to the Chilean people of July, 1825, the Supreme Director, Freire, declared that the British Government was waiting for a "legal organization" in Chile so that it might extend recognition. Heman Allen, United States Minister to Chile, reported that the Chilean Government showed deference to England and France from a desire to be recognized by those powers,²⁵ and he complained that

²² Joseph Planta to Mariano de Egaña, 22 January, 1825 (F. O. 16/4); WEBSTER, Vol. I, N° 170, p. 357.

²³ Report of Egaña, 21 May, 1825; *Sesiones de los cuerpos legislativos de la República de Chile, 1811 a 1845*, XI, 350-351; BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, XIV, 527.

²⁴ Supreme Director to the people, 12 July, 1825; MELCHOR CONCHA I TORO, *Chile durante los años de 1824 a 1828* (Santiago, 1862), pp. 303-304. Canning's reluctance to consider the political state of Chile as stable has been correctly characterized by BARROS ARANA as "[recognition of] the most indubitable truth". (*Historia jeneral de Chile*, XIV, 527).

²⁵ Heman Allen to Henry Clay, N° 19, 16 September, 1825; United States Department of State Archives, "Diplomatic dispatches, Chile", Vol. I.

the *rancho*, a tax on the products of the country, was paid by the United States naval agent on all articles purchased for the consumption of the squadron, but that naval agents of France and Great Britain were not required to pay it. British merchants were clearly favored and enjoyed "immense" profits. The Supreme Director in an address on the occasion of the installation of the National Congress on 4 July, 1826, declared that the circumspect attitude of the British Government toward Chile was in the greater part the product of the "spirit of detraction" of prejudiced foreign writers or of sinister reports based upon events of negligible significance.²⁶ He expressed the confident hope that Chile would soon be placed in the same category as Mexico, Colombia, and the United Provinces of La Plata.

The Chilean official reaction, however, was undergoing a change. Chilean independence had been recognized by the Government of the United States; that government was represented by a Minister, yet the British Government, whose interests in Chile were considerably greater, consistently refused to take the final step. As early as December, 1824, Manuel Antonio González, deputy for Coquimbo in the National Congress, moved that Mariano Egaña be recalled from London.²⁷ Three years later, the Chilean Government decided to do so. On 30 October, 1827, Vice-President Pinto reviewed the situation to the National Commission of Chile and stated that it would be incompatible with the prestige of the Government to continue to maintain a minister plenipotentiary in the British capital, since the British Government had steadily refused to recognize the independence of Chile but had not hesitated to admit that of certain other

²⁶ Message of the Supreme Director, 4 July, 1826; *British and foreign state papers*, XIII, 1008.

²⁷ *Sesiones de los cuerpos legislativos de la República de Chile, 1811 a 1845*, X, 166. The deputy from Coquimbo was disturbed by reports that Egaña was conspiring in London to establish a monarchy in Chile.

countries of the hemisphere.²⁸ He suggested the recall of Egaña, but believed it necessary to keep a consul general in the British capital in the interest of commerce. The National Commission thereupon approved the motion on 7 November.²⁹

The Egaña mission thus failed to achieve its primary objective. It likewise failed in other regards. Soon after entering upon his responsibilities, Egaña began attempts to influence industrialists to establish plants in the country. Since 1822 a representative appointed by O'Higgins, John O'Brien, who had fought in the war of independence, had been in Great Britain attempting to induce emigrants to go to Chile.³⁰ Egaña signed a contract with him on 11 October, 1824, by which O'Brien received five hundred pounds sterling to pay the transportation to Chile of a few men to advise the Government in developing industries producing porcelain, crockery, iron, and hemp,³¹ but the project ended in failure. He also signed a contract providing for emigration of farmers to settle in the territory between the rivers Imperial and Biobío.³² On 20 April, 1825, Egaña likewise made an agreement with a Spanish general, Antonio Quiroga, and Richard Gurney of the Inner Temple for a supply of colonists to settle an area of 28,000 square miles to be made available by the Chilean Government.³³ The plan, notwithstanding, collapsed as did a tenuous project to develop

²⁸ Remarks of Pinto, quoted in BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, XV, 206; ALBERTO CRUCHAGA OSSA, *Jurisprudencia de la cancillería chilena hasta 1865*, (Santiago de Chile, 1935), pp. 36-37.

²⁹ *Sesiones de los cuerpos legislativos de la República de Chile, 1811 a 1845*, XV, 141.

³⁰ BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, XIV, 529.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Diario de documentos del gobierno*, [de Chile] Nos. 43-45 (7-10 December, 1825).

³³ Memorandum of the provisional contract, 20 April, 1825; BENJ. VICUÑA MACKENNA (ed.), *Bases del informe presentado al supremo gobierno sobre la inmigración extranjera por la comisión nombrada con ese objeto* (Santiago de Chile, 1865), pp. 199-203.

industries by founding a National Bank of Chile supported by British capital.³⁴ Also to be noted here, he was active in promoting British interest in Chilean mines during a speculative frenzy of 1825;³⁵ he engaged the services of certain teachers, scientists, and doctors for the country.³⁶

Although recognition was clearly the dominant theme of Chilean policy toward Great Britain at this time, it would be incorrect to assume that British political interest in Chile was entirely passive in character. The Island of Chiloé, the last part of Chilean soil held by Spain, received the attention of the British Government. In June, 1824, after discussing its maritime significance to both Patriots and Royalists, Nugent informed Canning that its possession by Great Britain would give their country the key to the entire western side of South America.³⁷ Six years before, Commodore Bowles had shown the extent of British interest in the island when he expressed the fear that the arrival of the American agent Prevost perhaps indicated that the United States contemplated negotiations for its acquisition.³⁸ As viewed by the British, subsequent activities of the French gave ground for considerable alarm. Captain T. J. Maling of the Royal Navy informed Nugent in July, 1825, that the French were attempting to court popularity on the island, although English influence was preferred by the local officials.³⁹ The nature of the entire situation in Chiloé was again reported to Can-

³⁴ *La abeja chilena* (Santiago, 1825), N° 6 (20 August).

³⁵ *Sesiones de los cuerpos legislativos de la República de Chile, 1811 a 1845*, XI, 143-150.

³⁶ BARROS ARANA, *Historia jeneral de Chile*, XIV, 534; *Diario de documentos del gobierno*, Nos. 20, 21, 24.

³⁷ Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 4 June, 1824, Valparaíso; WEBSTER, Vol. I, N° 166, p. 353.

³⁸ J. FRED RIPPY, *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America (1808-1830)* ("The Albert Shaw lectures on diplomatic history, 1928"; Baltimore, 1928), pp. 12-13.

³⁹ Captain T. J. Maling to Christopher Nugent, 25 July, 1825, Valparaíso (F. O. 16/3); WEBSTER, I, 360-361.

ning, Nugent notifying him that Bolívar had made known to the Chilean Government his intention of employing an expedition for the reduction of the island.⁴⁰ The British Consul General again suggested the desirability of the British Government's paying close attention to conditions there. He reported that it was everywhere rumored that General Quintanilla, the Spanish commander, had expressed a wish to put Chiloé into the hands of the English. Although aware of the fact that British annexation of the island would be contrary to his government's policy, he requested instructions as to whether, in the event of Chile's or Peru's gaining possession of it, British naval commanders would be justified in occupying it to prevent Chilean-Peruvian friction, until the issue of ownership was settled. Clearly this position was a distinct attenuation of his own wishes in the matter. However strong the support given by diplomatic and naval representatives for annexation, the Foreign Office did not modify its opposition to territorial aggrandizement. Nugent was instructed to take no step toward annexation and was informed that it was contrary to British policy to assume the government or exclusive protection of any of the states which might arise from the Spanish colonies.⁴¹

The problem of recognition remained. The Chilean Con-

⁴⁰ Christopher Nugent to George Canning, 25 July, 1825, Valparaíso (F. O. 16/3); *ibid.*, Vol. I, N° 174, p. 360.

⁴¹ John Bidwell to Christopher Nugent, 26 May, 1826 (F. O. 16/5); *ibid.*, N° 179, pp. 366-367. Although the British Government thus definitively refused to annex Chiloé, it continued to regard French activities in that area with no little concern. The British Government made clear to the Government at Santiago that the contract which the French Government was reported desirous of signing with Chile for the privilege of cutting timber on Chiloé in return for French merchandise was viewed as a preference that the British Government could not see conceded with indifference. (Cited in John White to the Earl of Aberdeen, 4 January, 1830, Valparaíso [F. O. 16/12^a] *ibid.*, Vol. I, N° 181, p. 368). Indeed Lord Aberdeen, British Foreign Secretary, was informed that French designs on Chiloé were apparently not limited to the cutting of wood. (John White to Lord Aberdeen, 14 January, 1830, Valparaíso [F. O. 16/12^a] *ibid.*, N° 182, p. 369.

in Chile. Thus the British Government, after considerable delay and with some hesitation, had finally made a significant decision for the promotion of its economic interests in Chile.

The principal political objective of the Chilean Government toward Great Britain—recognition—had, however, not been achieved. Canning himself had not been certain that a stable government was a fact, and the rivalries of several provinces had convinced him of the desirability of deferring the extension of recognition until more evidence was at hand concerning the existence of orderly processes of political change in the country. Moreover, Canning apparently had believed in 1823 and 1824 that a monarchic organization could be established. Reports that British subjects were denied full civil privileges and the right of unmolested religious worship had also gained currency. Of much greater importance had been the effect of suspension of payments upon the loan of 1822 by Chile four years later. Finally, it had been British practice to avoid haste in extending recognition to newly established states even if British economic interests might be benefited by so doing. The impartial student of Chilean political history in the 1820's, of the struggles between the *Pipiolos*, or liberals, and the *Pelucos*, or conservatives, which culminated in the bloody battle of Lircay on 17 April, 1830, cannot but conclude that the refusal of the British Government to recognize Chile at that time was justified by developments.

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