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# GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD HUNTER

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## RESUMEN

Sir Archibald Hunter fue gobernador de Gibraltar de 1910 a 1913, y fue uno de los gobernadores más odiados. En su tiempo en Gibraltar tuvo divergencias con el *Exchange Committee*, la Cámara de Comercio, los *Sanitary Commissioners* y la policía. Una delegación fue a Inglaterra para presentar una protesta al Secretario de Estado de las Colonias, y Hunter fue depuesto.

**Palabras clave:** Sir Archibald Hunter, *Gibraltar Exchange Committee*, Cámara de Comercio de Gibraltar, *Gibraltar Sanitary Commissioners*

## ABSTRACT

Sir Archibald Hunter, Governor of Gibraltar from 1910 to 1913, proved to be one of the most unpopular holders of that office. During his tenure, he managed to alienate all members of Gibraltar society, including the Exchange Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, the Sanitary Commissioners, and the police. A Deputation of prominent local citizens duly left for England to protest to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and in due course, Hunter was recalled before his full tenure of office had been completed.

**Key words:** Sir Archibald Hunter, Gibraltar Exchange Committee, Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce, Gibraltar Sanitary Commissioners

General Sir Archibald Hunter assumed command at Gibraltar on the 4th. October, 1910. A Scot, educated at Glasgow Academy and Sandhurst he came with a long and distinguished military career behind him, having served in Egypt and Sudan in the 1880's and 1890's and in the Boer War of 1899-1901. In this latter, he had played a valuable role in the defence of Ladysmith. Mentioned numerous times in despatches, he had been awarded the DSO and the KCB. The new Governor, furthermore, came at the comparatively young age of 54, and Gibraltar, going through a trade recession as a result of the completion of the Dock Works and a reduction in the Garrison, welcomed his arrival with high hopes of better times to come. Sir Archibald was no stranger to the Rock, having been stationed there from 1875 to 1879.

Two weeks after being sworn in, the new Governor was on his way back to England on leave, during which time he married Lady Mary Inverclyde, a widow. Early in the new year, 1911, the local newspaper *El Anunciador* reported that persistent rumours in the Town had it that the recently arrived Governor was about to tender his resignation and be moved to a higher post, either in Egypt or South Africa. The newspaper expressed the hope that such rumours were untrue.

as we had entertained great hopes in the administration of so clever, active and genial a man.”

Gibraltar, as a whole, was to sing a very different tune two years later! As it happened the rumour proved to be unfounded. Better for Gibraltar if it had been true!

Things were relatively peaceful during the course of the year 1911, though some of the Governor's views (not made public) throw some light on the shape of things to come. In some private notes to the Colonial Secretary, Sir Frederick Evans, regarding the estimates for the following year, Sir Archibald made the telling comment that:

One of our first aims in Gibraltar is to diminish the existing civil population. Emigration is obviously one of the simplest means to further such a policy.

Because, he continued, an educated man had a better chance of being accepted elsewhere than an uneducated one, he would urge the need for compulsory education in Gibraltar.

Towards the end of the year an incident occurred which again gave the Governor an opportunity to express his views on local matters. A civilian had broken the ranks of the guard on the march. In trying to stop him, the Lieutenant in charge had injured the civilian's hand with his sword. The latter sued for damages and won the case. The Lieutenant complained to his Commanding Officer that this decision had been taken by an all-Gibraltarian jury in the face of all evidence and a strong summing up by the Lord Chief Justice in favour of the defendant.

The matter was referred to the Governor who had the following observations to make:

This is not a personal matter for settlement by an individual officer. It is a matter of the rights of the Garrison of Gibraltar to carry out their duty without illegal interference on the part of the civilians who are allowed to live here.

If the Gibraltar Police force did their duty properly, regulated the traffic, and arrested and brought to justice offenders against the law, this case would not and could not have happened.

The Military here, as is well known, have endured continual trespassing and acts of violence from the Civilians here of late.

The entire blame for this rests on the inefficient way in which the Police duties in the streets are performed. In my opinion the Police fund should pay the consequences of the Police shortcomings.

The end of the year 1912 brought a bombshell for the inhabitants of the Rock. Writing to the Senior Naval Officer in December, the Governor stated that after two years' experience in command at Gibraltar he had become convinced that the Landport entrance should be closed to civilians, who would be required to enter, from the direction of Spain, via the Waterport and Casemate Gates.

Furthermore, Dockyard labourers would be allowed access to the town to shop on their way to work, when few citizens would be about, but on leaving their place of work to return to Spain, they would be required to go via Reclamation Road (Queensway today), and if they wished to enter the town they would have to do so via the Waterport and Casemates Gates.

What reasons did Sir Archibald give for these decisions? With regard to the closure of Landport Gate, the Governor argued that the Casemate Barrack Square was a private parade ground, allotted by military authority to the troops in those barracks. He claimed that the privacy of the troops was continually disturbed by the passage of noisy crowds through the Landport Tunnel. The general objects of the new regulations were described as the better regulation of traffic and the removal of obstruction in the public streets of the City.

A Government Notice, published on the 30th. December, 1912, announced the new regulations to the people of Gibraltar. They were to come into effect on New Year's Day, 1913. A storm of protest followed from all quarters. The Chamber of Commerce complained to the Governor that these regulations were bound to have an adverse effect on the shopkeepers in Main Street and adjacent lanes with a resultant loss to merchants and landholders. When the Chamber requested that His Excellency receive a deputation to discuss the matter, they were told that the Governor would be convening a meeting to give his views on various matters.

The Exchange Committee also protested. Many grocery and other retail trade shops had been opened in Main Street to meet the demand created by the building of the Dockyard at the turn of the century. Many would face financial ruin as a result of the new Order. It was also pointed out to Sir Archibald that to expect labourers to do their shopping at the crack of dawn on their way to work was impractical. Even if the shops were to open at that early hour it would be unreasonable to expect that labourers from Spain hurrying to their work immediately after early morning gunfire would stop on the way to shop. In any case, added the Exchange Committee, the workers had no place to store their goods in safety during working hours. The reply from the Governor was the same as given to the Chamber of Commerce.

A deputation of Dockyard labourers appealed to the Senior Naval Officer, who, in turn, asked the Governor to reconsider the Order because it had created much unrest and dissatisfaction among the Spanish labourers. Since at that time many of the skilled Spanish mechanics were leaving for Ferrol, Casablanca and other places and the unskilled labourers for South America and Ceuta, the Senior Naval Officer thought it desirable from the point of view of efficiency and economy in the Naval Establishments to keep the Dockyard workers happy. In any case, since the men working in the Dockyard were well under 1,000 the reduction in traffic congestion would be minimal. He also pointed out that the men had long distances to walk, some living as far afield as Campamento, and any addition to

their journey was very tiring after a long day in the Dockyard. The Senior Naval Officer concluded by saying that because the very large number of Spaniards employed by the Military and others about the City were not affected by the Order, the Dockyard men felt that they were being discriminated against. As with all the others, these complaints fell on deaf ears!

The Governor convened a meeting on the 31st. January 1913, at the Garrison Lecture Room in Wellington Front, during the course of which he pontificated upon just every aspect of life in Gibraltar. Summoned to the meeting were all the prominent civilian and military officials.

The Governor, claiming that after two years he knew Gibraltar better than anyone else with the exception of the Chief of Police and the Colonial Secretary, spoke at great length about traffic congestion in Main Street.

Often I have been prevented (...) from having access to my own front door. (...) I have been hustled off the pavement into the ditch (...) The crowd takes up the whole road (...) Ladies walking in the public thoroughfares have been covered with dirt and grease. (...) a lady staying in my house, walking with her husband in the street, had her dress spat upon by a Gibraltar man.

The Chamber of Commerce were accused of thinking only of themselves. The Fortress was not maintained for purely commercial interests and the Governor thought that there were too many shops in Gibraltar.

In response to the criticism levelled at his recent Order concerning traffic flow, Sir Archibald was adamant:

There are places I will let Civilians go to and there are places I shall prevent their going to. There are routes they may follow, and routes they may not.

Press censorship was threatened, the Police were ignorant and did not enforce the law, and the telephone operator at the Colonial Hospital could not speak English.

The English spoken in Gibraltar the Governor described as “gibberish”;

English is no better spoken here in general than by Kaffir-rickshaw men in Durban and nothing like so well as by a donkey-boy at Suez or Cairo.

The Jews’ Market should be swept away for it created dirt, attracted an undesirable crowd, and sold junk. The Sanitary Commissioners were chastised for failing to maintain the roads adequately and for mismanaging the Poor Relief Funds. The Market had no right to be where it was as Military regulation forbade any building to exist within a certain distance of fortifications.

Some of the public toilets were “an outrage to public decency”, people were accused of throwing all their dirt and rubbish on to the roads, Gibraltar was infested with beggars, and Elliott’s Monument in the Alameda Gardens had been defaced. There were far too many liquor shops and adulterated liquor was sold. The Assembly Rooms were an eyesore. Public manners were appalling: men walked abreast on the pavement and never gave way to a lady, they shouted, gesticulated, quarrelled and spat most offensively.

Lack of space made a Crematorium essential, and from the military point of view, according to Sir Archibald

the only view that has any important weight in Gibraltar” the many civilian constructions on the North Front would have to go.

Concluded Sir Archibald:

I am determined to exact order and decency here from everybody who comes into the Fortress I command. Let everybody understand that.

Then, without inviting comments, the Governor strode out of the room leaving behind him a shell-shocked audience!

Clearly, like Sir Robert Gardiner over half a century earlier, this Governor viewed Gibraltar exclusively in Military terms, regarding the civilian element as a nuisance to be kept in its place. Writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies a few days after his lecture, he accused the Chamber of Commerce of impropriety in challenging his Order.

No body of civilians here has the right to dispute my military orders.

Amongst the remarks made by Sir Archibald Hunter on the 31st. January had been one describing Gibraltar Juries as partisan and notoriously unjust in favour of their own. This provoked a Memorial from the Jurors of Gibraltar stating that they felt deeply insulted and aggrieved by the Governor’s words. This was rapidly followed by a Memorial from the Chamber of Commerce, which Sir Archibald described as

a continuance of interference by a body of civilians with the Military control of this Fortress.

He threatened to submit the Memorial to the War Office but the Colonial Secretary diplomatically reminded him that by Colonial Service Regulations he was required to transmit the Memorial to the Colonial Office

The Exchange Committee also prepared a Memorial in which they denied the Governor’s assertion that Gibraltar was one of the dirtiest places in Europe They stated that

observant travellers who visit Gibraltar are unanimous in their appreciation of the cleanliness of its streets.

The accusation that the inhabitants had little respect for law was countered by the statement contained in the preface to the laws of Gibraltar, published in 1890 by the then Attorney-General:

The people of Gibraltar are second to none of Her Majesty’s subjects in their respect for the laws and their law-abiding principles.

Matters moved quickly after this. On the 3rd. March, 1913, a Deputation comprised of Messrs. Porral and Sallust Smith left for England to meet the Secretary of State for the Colonies. They were soon reporting back that they had been received by the Secretary of State, who had informed them that the Governor had been granted three months leave of absence, and that the Deputation’s complaints against him would be investigated with a view to reaching a

just solution. On the 25th. March 1913, Sir Archibald Hunter left Gibraltar on leave. By early April rumours were rife on the Rock that he had resigned.

On the 26th. June 1913, the news broke that Sir Archibald Hunter had resigned and would be replaced by Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Miles. The new Governor was sworn into office on the 19th. August and on the 27th. November, the Traffic Regulation respecting the route to be taken by Dockyard workmen, which had been described as unreasonable by the Chief Justice of Gibraltar the previous May, was repealed. Things were back to normal on the Rock of Gibraltar!

However, Sir Archibald Hunter had not quite finished with Gibraltar. Five years after his enforced resignation as Governor he stood for election to the House of Commons in the constituency of Lancaster. During one of his election speeches, publicised in the British press, Sir Archibald stated that

the population (of Gibraltar) were really anti-British and pro-German.

There was a storm of protest in Gibraltar, tempers only being calmed by a counter-statement from Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien that

every day convinces me that in no part of the Empire is His Majesty served by more intensely British and law-abiding subjects than in the Fortress of which I am proud to be Governor.