

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones... these are the rules of the Fourth International"

Leon Trotsky

How this dispute arose

Last Sunday five out of eight comrades present at the EC voted to change the basic position of the organisation on the conflict between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. They voted to drop the call for Argentina to withdraw from the Falklands - not to avoid using it in the paper in a way that might blunt the edge of our defeatism towards Britain (which is common ground), but to remove it completely as our basic position. They voted that the WSL should adopt a 'victory to Argentina' position.

I shall hereafter refer to the position we held in common at the last NC and up to the EC as the old position, and that of the majority of the EC as the new position.

Of those absent two (Parkinson and Carolán) were known to be emphatically for the old position. As far as I know neither of the other two (Gardiner and Noonan) had expressed support for a change of line.

Four of those voting for the new position (Smith, Jones, Cunliffe, Levy) argued that it was not a matter of changing the WSL position but of 'developing' it in line with the development of the conflict into outright war. One (Morrow) argued that the WSL's position had been mistaken throughout and should be rectified.

Now either it is common ground between the two sides that there has been an important change in the situation, not taken account of in our positions so far - or it isn't. It isn't. Varying assessments exist on the importance of the 12 mile limit imposed by Britain on Argentina. But on the basic issues a substantial part of the EC rejects the idea that there has been a radical change in the situation demanding a radical change by the WSL. We reject the idea that the EC majority last Sunday voted to 'develop' the old position: they voted to overturn and negate it.

From this arose the question of the status of the EC decision.

The EC has the power of the NC between NCs. It cannot normally reverse NC positions except in response to new situations and important exigencies unforeseen at the time of the NC taking its position. At the April 25 NC there had been a motion from the Merseyside branch calling for the WSL to come out for Argentine victory. No NC member voted for it - two abstained.

It was abadly attended NC. Had there been a serious dispute, then the bad attendance would have meant that the decision lacked authority. But there was no serious dispute among NC members.

The Merseyside NC members were absent, but they would have voted against their branch's motion had they been there. Comrade Eliot spoke in favour of the motion but did not vote for it - presumably she was swayed in the discussion. Cds Jones and Cunliffe were present at the NC and supported the decisions taken.

At the time of the NC it was already plain that the conflict in the Falklands was likely to be a major one. The sinking of the

two ships does not amount to a qualitative change since the time of the NC: the two sides have started shooting from the positions and postures they already held at the time of the NC. "Thatcher threatens pitched battle" was already our front-page headline immediately after the NC, without anyone suggesting that this should change our basic line.

In any case, the decision to change the basic position could not reasonably be justified as an urgent response to the escalation of the war. A change of position to that of favouring Argentina could not arise unless the entire character of the war and of Britain's objectives in it changed. Our politics are not conjunctural, dependent on the ebbs and flows of battle. They flow from a principled class analysis.

For these reasons supporters of the old position on the EC insisted that the EC position could not become WSL policy unless endorsed by an NC. The EC majority comrades accepted that. It was then a question of whether to wait two weeks for the scheduled NC or have an emergency NC this weekend. The new position comrades chose the latter.

The TILC resolution

The resolution put by the WSL EC to the TILC conference at Easter (IB 5) remains an adequate revolutionary platform for our work in Britain and elsewhere.

The new position comrades believe it commits us to a change of position such as they advocate in conditions which they say now exist. We shall see that they are mistaken.

This is the relevant sentence:

"While recognising that the present conflict is restricted to the Falklands issue, in the event of a full-scale war between Britain and Argentina we would be unequivocally for the defence of Argentina".

The second part of the sentence, following the comma, is not as clear as it might be. The first part is perfectly clear and adequate. It defines how we see the conflict and therefore what is meant in the second part of the sentence by "full-scale war".

A shift in the situation?

The question is not the scale of the war but its nature. Is it war over the Falklands, or a threat by British imperialism to subjugate Argentina, an escalation of the conflict (not of the military action) to the point of the survival of Argentina's sovereignty displacing the Falklands as the issue in dispute?

Some comrades, if I understand them correctly, argue that the Falklands are no longer the issue because the war is now a trial of strength between imperialism and Argentina. Every war is a trial of strength between the rival powers, and this conflict was a trial of strength right from April 2. Neither government is or was fundamentally concerned for the Falklands or the Falklanders. Both the British imperialist government and the Argentine sub-imperialist military dictatorship are concerned to assert their prestige and strength by seizing the islands. That defines the war as reactionary on both sides. The war would become a progressive one on Argentina's side only if it became one between British imperialism and Argentine national liberation.

No such shift has taken place. The fighting does not amount to such a shift. The 12 mile limit is a blow within the parameters of

the conflict over the Falklands. All war is a conflict over disputed 'sovereignty' and a trial of strength.

Even the most brutal and reactionary particular blows struck by Britain cannot change Galtieri's war into a progressive war. If Britain bombs mainland Argentine airfields and ports, we will denounce the imperialist act. But when Galtieri uses such British aggression to obscure the overall picture and claim that his war is really one to defend Argentine national rights, it will still be the duty of Argentine Marxists to explain that Galtieri is lying.

To focus on the individual blows at Argentine sovereignty at the expense of the overall nature of the war implies to be for Argentina. This could only be grounded in principled proletarian politics if overall assessment of the war led us to back Argentina. But assessment of the issues led us in fact to indignantly reject the attempt of the Argentine junta to extend and assert its sovereignty over the islands. To become sensitive to the implications for Argentine sovereignty of this or that blow in the war so that we forget that we rejected Argentina's claim to extend its area of sovereignty - that is to lose our bearings. It is to abandon principled politics and adopt what Rosa Luxemburg, writing against the centrists in World War 1, called:

"not fundamental tactics, but conjunctural politics, cut to fit the military situation of the moment... the famous politics from case to case, the old opportunistic seesaw politics..."

War and politics

War is a continuation of politics by other means, as Morrow rightly says. To have an attitude to the war, once shooting starts, in contradiction with our attitude to the politics which it continues (the Argentine invasion and the British response) violates that principle. It is to recommend to Argentine Marxists that they should be like the traitor-socialists in 1914: very internationalist, very intransigent, very clear in their assessment of the forces in conflict - until the first shot was fired! It is ourselves to capitulate. It is not capitulation to the pressure of our own bourgeoisie, rather to the pressure which is closest to us, that of the left: but failure to keep our bearings against such small, immediate pressures today is bad preparation for keeping our bearings against bigger and worse pressures tomorrow.

The basis of our position

Our principles, spelled out at the beginning, are these:

- 1) Argentina has no legitimate claim to the Falklands.
- 2) The Argentine regime is a major bulwark of imperialism in South America. The invasion was designed to reinforce the Argentine military against working class opposition and other sections of the Argentine ruling class. It was an act of colonialism.
- 3) Argentina should not have invaded and should now withdraw.
- 4) We are defeatists for British imperialism. Britain is neither primarily motivated by the just demands of the Falkland islanders to decide their own future free of military rule by a foreign people, nor a reliable defender of those demands.

The Argentine claim to the Falklands: history

The Argentine claim is preposterous from a working class point of view and totally irrelevant to serious anti-imperialism.

The historical facts are these (taken from the Encyclopaedia Americana).

There is a dispute about whether an English or a Spanish ship first discovered the Falklands in the 16th century. British settlement began in 1765 (no doubt motivated by the strategic importance of the island's position). It was at first resisted, but in 1771 recognised and accepted by Spain. Britain abandoned the island in 1774. After 1774 Spain built houses and fortifications on the islands but abandoned them in 1811. Then in 1829 the Argentine federation sent two dozen colonists led by Louis Vernet. In 1831 Vernet's 'government' seized a US sealing ship for 'encroachment'. The US - the democratic republic, then the beacon for revolutionary democrats throughout the world, whose expansion at the expense of stagnant Mexico in the 1840s Marx was to defend and praise - sent a corvette, the 'Lexington', which forced many of the colonists to evacuate.

In 1833 Britain removed the remaining settlers and British settlement began again. It has been continuous since then. Some of the present inhabitants are said to be descendants of the 1833 settlement.

150 years is a long time. In 1833 Argentina was a backward country, a federation loosely tied together on the basis of the old Spanish colonial administrative unit (from which Uruguay and Paraguay had broken off). Whole vast areas of the American continent like California were still not settled; states were still being carved out; the markets that would knit the viable ones together were still rudimentary or undeveloped. Modern Argentine nationalism, which dates from the 1920s, was a century in the future.

The idea that Argentine possession of the Falklands for four years gives it a valid claim/grievance that remains good down the years and has weight against the fact that a distinct population has been shaped in the Falklands, has nothing in common with Marxism. It can only be justified on grounds of a revanchist Argentine nationalism, and a nationalism of a mystical sort, outside of history and material and social facts.

The Argentine claim: our criteria

For Marxists the decisive question is the wishes of the population - other things being equal. The population of the Falklands is historically, culturally, linguistically, nationally, and in its conception of itself a distinct entity. There is no sense in which it is Argentine. It is also markedly cut off and distinct geographically - 400 miles from Argentina.

Are other things equal? Yes. They do not exploit any other community in the islands. The islands are not - and in fact never have been - a base from which Argentina was dominated, threatened, or subjugated.

Are the islands a potential site for imperialist military bases? Yes. But Britain and Argentina are part of the same imperialist bloc. And there is strong evidence (see the New Statesman article circulated in photocopy) that Argentine possession could well be the prelude to the establishment of a base by the US.

In any case, for us to say it is better that Argentina should have the islands and the potential for military bases there, and that therefore we support Argentina in occupying a foreign territory to which it has no right we recognise, and subjugating the people of that territory, to get those bases - what does that come down to in working class political terms?

There are no possible working class or anti-imperialist gains from such an occupation. It will not 'liberate' or lessen military pressure on a Third World country (which Argentina anyway essentially is not). It will not be a blow against imperialism - on the contrary it may well strengthen the hand of imperialism in the South Atlantic - specifically the hand of US imperialism, to which Argentina serves as a sub-imperialism in the region.

Under what circumstances should our basic position be changed?

These were the considerations that led us to reject the idea of siding with Argentina in the conflict, and which underpin the TILC resolution.

They would only be offset if the entire character of the war changed and if Argentina were threatened with reduction to a colony or semi-colony. The fact that Britain is an imperialist power and Argentina a mere adjunct of US imperialism - a capitalist economic and military power of the second or third rank, playing the role of a sub-imperialism in the region - would then have implications for our attitude to the conflict.

But such a change in the character of the war would require far more than episodic shifts on the battlefield or an escalation of fighting. It would require a political and strategic shift so huge as to be barely conceivable.

"If England should be victorious she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil", says Trotsky in a discussion quoted by Morrow, arguing in 1938 for siding with Brazil - despite the Vargas dictatorship - in a possible war with Britain. But the Vargas regime was one of a very different character from Galtieri's, and the motives Trotsky envisaged for a possible war were different. The world situation was also very different.

If Britain were still a flourishing imperialism, an attempt by it to put 'another fascist' in control of Argentina and place 'double chains' on it might be logical and likely as the British war aim in a conflict initiated on an apparently irrelevant motives.

But Britain lost its economic domination over Argentina four decades ago. There is no evidence that it sees regaining that domination as a realistic objective.

For four decades British imperialism has been in rapid decline. It has proved unable to maintain military control even over small outposts like Aden. After the Vietnam war, even US imperialism finds itself weak, unable to impose its will on Nicaragua and having great difficulty in El Salvador.

Against this background in this context, it is inconceivable that Britain could succeed in conquering Argentina - a major industrialised country, with a level of development similar to Spain, Greece, or Portugal. It is even more inconceivable that in an effort at conquest Britain could retain the united support of imperialism which the 'new position' comrades make so much of. The US and Italy, in particular, which dominate Argentina economically today, are hardly going to support an attempt by Britain to replace them as the dominant power.

The replacement of the Galtieri regime is certainly not an objective of imperialism. Dennis Healey, the nearest thing to an official spokesperson for US imperialism among leading British politicians, told the Tories last week that while he supported them fully they should beware on one point. They should not push so hard that Galtieri falls! The replacement would surely be much less amenable to imperialism.

to an effort by Britain to subjugate

The TILC resolution and now

During the TILC conference we had to have a recess to allow the WSL delegation to discuss our position. We had found divergent attitudes/positions to exist within support for the common resolution. We reached agreement on that occasion. It is now clear however that different understandings of the resolution persisted. None of us expected that the conflict would reach the level of military seriousness it has reached. Now some comrades want to abandon our basic assessment because it has become a serious military conflict.

The way to proceed, however, is not by pretending that we are 'developing' the old position, but to re-examine our basic positions. If we have made a mistake - and whether they know it or not that is what the position of SJCL implies - we must be prepared to say so. Otherwise we will miseducate ourselves and the rest of the organisation.

The positions in the dispute

There are two basic positions in the dispute - that of the TILC resolution and that of Morrow. Then there is a hybrid position - SJLC - which accepts the basic assessments of the TILC resolution and wants now to add to those assessments the conclusions that flow (and flow logically) from Morrow's position.

Only two of these positions are tenable - Morrow's and ours. The hybrid position does not add up.

Either Argentina has rights in the Falklands or it doesn't. Either the issue is one of imperialism versus some degree of liberation of a 'dependent' country, a 'neo-colony' or whatever - or else it isn't.

Either Argentina has rights and real national liberation issues involved, and we side with it in a struggle for them - or it doesn't.

Morrow says it does have rights in the Falklands and therefore that there is a real issue of Argentine national liberation involved. Though he would not have advocated the invasion he supports the position that flows from it. This is logically consistent - even though it is rubbish as a picture of the real world and of the issues in the dispute.

SJLC say that Argentina had and has no rights in the Falklands, that it shouldn't have invaded, that it should have got out (when Britain was merely threatening it). Now they also say that it ceased to be necessary for Argentina to get out - when? When the Belgrano was sunk? When the 12 mile limit was imposed? That is, when the military consequences of the act of war carried out by Argentina and the fact that the British ruling class decided to fight began to fall into place.

Politics that turn 360 degrees on their axis according to conjunctural events, to the ebbs and flows of the war within the parameters of the military conflict over the Falklands, contain all sorts of contradictions.

Not only the Belgrano was sunk; so was the Sheffield. We are told that British ships are vulnerable.

It is quite possible that other British ships will be sunk; that there will be very big casualties in an invasion of the Falklands.

It is ruled out that the comrades' conjunctural politics on the issue should swing to support for Britain. But if Argentina is doing well - slaughtering the British, rendering the blockade ineffective, holding positions in the islands against invasion - will that then modify the position of support for Argentina that the comrades adopted when the Belgrano was sunk? Why not? Why shouldn't the basic assessment (flowing from our view of the rights

and wrongs of the issue) reassert itself? Logically it should (and the military picture I have painted is not fantastic. Over a few months Britain probably could not sustain the war effort without US logistic support).

A test case against imperialism?

But in fact, if I understand the comrades, their shift is not really a response to this or that event, even though the events may have fuelled or triggered it, but they say that the war, whatever the issue, has become a great test case between imperialism and - what? Either imperialism versus national liberation - i.e. anti-imperialism is involved in the Falklands dispute - or not. And in the basic analysis SJLC say it is not.

The great test case approach flows from an assessment of how it appears in the world, on where the sympathies of the Latin American masses lie, on whether the events will be a negative or a plus in the consciousness of anti-imperialists throughout the world.

It is true that the overwhelming sentiment in Latin America is for Argentina. For the rest, such things as world-wide psychological mood are extremely hard to gauge. And they cannot be a determinant for Marxist politics. Moreover: if they can, they should have led us to support Argentina right from April 2.

In his discussion of proletarian morality, of the alleged a-moralism of Lenin and Bolshevism, or their supposed adherence to the (alleged) Jesuit principle of the end justifying the means, Trotsky formulated the question of what can and cannot be admissible for proletarian revolutionaries approximately as follows: Do whatever rouses the masses, strengthens their combativity, self-confidence and revolutionary consciousness.

Support, once it is engaged with Britain in a shooting war, for the Argentine state on the grounds that the issue has become a test case between imperialism and the others, because it is seen as such, would be far outside Trotsky's formula. It abuses the consciousness of the subjectively anti-imperialist masses on a number of important points.

Argentine chauvinism

It is in the nature of nationalist movements and sentiments to ignore or resent and suppress their own closest minority nations, peoples, or fragments of peoples. Unless some greater principle is involved (such as the Argentine people's right not to have the Falklands used as a base to threaten or subjugate them) it is an outrage to proletarian democracy to brutally seize the people of the Falklands. Marxists need to say that - and to say it clearly. The Argentine socialist who does not say it is an Argentine chauvinist. Actions like . . . , appropriately carried out by the butcher junta, poison and miseducate the masses who accept them as a blow against imperialism.

Fake anti-imperialism

Colonialism and anti-imperialism are not identical. Colonialism is close to being a historical category. Imperialism is dominant in most of the world. The rhetoric of anti-colonialism is not anti-imperialism.

Quite the contrary (and ed Morrow should think about this) - the presently dominant imperialist power, the USA, had anti-colonialism as a major ideological weapon of its drive to imper-

ial hegemony on the basis of its gigantic economic strength. Until after it had used dollar power to finally prize open the old French and British imperialist blocks - that is, until the late 1940s - anti-colonialism was central to the ideology of US imperialism.

General sentiments against colonialism, or against imperialism conceived mainly as colonialism, can actually shield the operation of the imperialism that really exists, as it really exists.

The vast waves of the colonial revolution that rolled for three decades after World War 2 have left capitalist regimes in varying degrees of subservience to imperialism and of economic dominance by capital from the metropolitan countries. The only alternative would have been the international socialist revolution. The rhetoric of anti-colonialism continues to express the resentment and the aspirations of the masses, but with less and less purchase on the realities of the world.

In Latin America there is a vast continent-wide hatred of foreign economic domination. It is a political factor that regimes of all sorts of political coloration have to take into account. Studied assertiveness, 'insolence' and denunciation of the US are staples of Latin American regimes. But the economic ties continue.

Theoretically there are two alternatives to such economic ties continuing in their existing forms.

1. Proletarian revolution which would transform them, and the place of the less developed countries in the world economy.
2. To attempt to become nationally autarchic. In fact this is impossible and would be totally reactionary. Yet ideologically the 'inner life' of the sort of undefined mass populist nationalism that is so widespread in Latin America is a dialogue between the reactionary utopia of autarchy (often consciously held up as a goal by Maoists and other 'leftists') and the proletarian revolution. Autarchy is the logical goal of the nationalist demagogues from right to left. Most of them know better - and fake.

... And why we should not endorse it

Support for the idea that the Argentine junta is striking a blow at imperialism in the current dispute will do the opposite of raising consciousness on such questions.

The sabre-battling of the Argentine junta is part of the faking endemic to all Latin American bourgeois regimes. The comrades know that the invasion was almost certainly a desperate throw by the junta as everything around them threatened to collapse. Yet now they say that because the junta has succeeded in passing off their annexation of the Falklands as genuine anti-imperialism (remember, SJLC share with us the view that it wasn't), we should rush to endorse the conmanship, lap up and spread the delusion. I can't see any sense in this.

The job for Marxists is to keep their heads, analyse the world, and, to those we can reach, then explain the conmanship of junta anti-imperialism and make propaganda for our international socialist programme.

Our political, moral and actual right to talk to the Latin American masses is secured by our revolutionary defeatism towards our own government. We have to maintain the political clarity to explain (and to understand) what real anti-imperialism is and what the stock-in-trade of the bankrupt bourgeois and petty-bourgeois

politicians of the 3rd World is.

We won't do that if we go beyond British defeatism and support Argentina, either on the basis of the lie (which we knew and said to be a lie) that the Falklands are an issue in a real anti-imperialist struggle, or, indefensibly and unforgivably, because we want to jump on the bandwagon in support of the fake anti-imperialism of the Argentine Junta.

Effects of an Argentine victory

The psychological speculation about the world - or Latin American - masses in the present conflict is speculation and, as I argue, not the decisive thing anyway. A likely effect of a victory for Argentina, however, to which comrades should apply their minds, is that it will strengthen the junta and secure the grip of this murderous regime over the Argentine workers for another period.

That defeat for the Argentine working class will continue to be a major factor in the mass psychology of Latin America long after any illusory feeling that justice is being done consequent on an Argentine victory has vanished, leaving nothing behind it.

We should fight for the defeat of British imperialism. But those who want positive support for Argentina should tell us what assessment they make of the consequences to mass anti-imperialist psychology of the continued rule of the butchers of the Argentine working class for the period ahead.

If there were a genuine issue of Argentine national rights, a genuine anti-imperialist struggle, then we would have no choice but to side with even this junta, striving to create working class independence within the struggle for liberation. The model would be the Trotskyists' support for China's national war against the Japanese invaders, under the leadership of the counter-revolutionary Chiang Kai Shek.

Those who assert that such is the case with Argentina are utterly confused (Morrow) or Argentine chauvinists and dyed-in-the-wool capitalators to Peronist nationalism (Moreno). But at least they are consistent and logical after a fashion.

Not so SJLC, who like us deny all that and merely want to take sides according to the issues as the junta in Buenos Aires have succeeded in misrepresenting them to a lot of people.

It was possible to talk of a national war of Chinese liberation in 1937 even under the leadership of Chiang Kai Shek, and our comrades then did that. It is scarcely possible to think of an analogous type of struggle against the sort of imperialism that dominates Latin America and much of the world. Working class independence and a working class programme are the basis for fighting an imperialism that operates through economic penetration and domination.

Any explicit or implied programme to lop off the links with the world market and roll the second rank capitalist countries backward economically is reactionary and contrary to the working-class international programme. In the historical experience of versions of this being tried, from Argentina in the '40s to '60s to Southern Ireland from 1932 to '58, it is a blind alley.

Therefore proletarian independence is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the very possibility of the working class being able to play its progressive historic role and avoiding being taken in tow by nationalist demagoguery.

To endorse the Argentine junta as anti imperialist or 'objectively anti-imperialist' is to forget all about this, and to see our political responsibility as stretching no further than to go with the 'left' 'mass' mood. That is to misunderstand the fundamental raison d'etre of the WSL.

To endorse militaristic, tokenist, mini-colonialist action like the junta's invasion as anti imperialist is to take responsibility for presenting reactionary and counterproductive deeds, by the enemies of the working class and the supporters of imperialism in Argentina and elsewhere, as anti-imperialism.

Telling the truth

What we do and don't do is aimed to heighten the awareness of the working class and oppressed masses of their real situation and what they really must do to change it. To present the anti working class junior partners of US imperialism who rule in Buenos Aires as anti-imperialist or objectively anti-imperialist is to tell lies to all whom we can reach.

Even in terms of the political species to which it belongs, the junta's anti-imperialism is spurious and hollow. All Latin American regimes fake for the masses while maintaining the key economic links. Since 1976 the junta has systematically and successfully dismantled the economic nationalist structure built up since the early '40s and set out to attract foreign capital.

As Marxists we hold no brief for the previous system. Far from it. But what does it mean to tell the Latin American masses, or rather to endorse the current lie, that it meaningful anti-imperialism - or objectively anti-imperialism, or a symbolic test case of anti-imperialism - for this junta, the organiser of a big new penetration of imperialist capital in Argentina, to do what it has done in the Falklands? It is to become a part of the utter political disorientation and confusion that reigns among Third World revolutionaries whose ideological tools for understanding modern imperialism are the conceptions appropriate to the struggle against colonialism.

Even if the Falklands were a real issue of Argentine sovereignty that would be so - because they would be such a marginal element. For those like SLJC who don't think that the Falklands are even that - the proper conclusion to their analysis is the one we formerly held in common.

We do not endorse the 'anti imperialism' of the junta - either before the invasion, after it, or during the war that is the consequence of it.

Internationalism

What SJLC propose can also only have a harmful effect on the internationalist consciousness of the British working class. In effect what they propose is to abandon the goal of internationalism and (in the belief that we are being anti-imperialist) adopt Argentine - or Latin American bloc - nationalism. The nationalism of the oppressed is not the same as the nationalism of the oppressor. But this profound thought translates into concrete terms according to what is going on in the real world.

And of course Leninists are never participants in even the nationalism of the oppressed. We try to coopt its progressive goals (freedom from oppression, freedom of development) into our internationalist working class politics.

The anti-imperialist demagogy of the present Argentine regime is part of the mere ideological form of Argentine nationalism and

chauvinism. Argentina has had no struggle for national independence in any modern sense - or in any sense since 1811. Modern Argentine nationalism dates from the '20s and '30s and was part of the world-wide wave of nationalism and chauvinism then.

Since the '40s it has been dominated by Peronism, which in some of its forms consciously copied fascism. Moreover, Argentina is a state consisting entirely of white European colonists - a down-market Canada or Australia, vastly different from most Latin American countries. To describe existing Argentine nationalism and chauvinism as anti-imperialism is, I believe, culpably naive.

What do the British workers see in the Falklands war? A vicious regime, warlike aggression, the seizure of territory and of inoffensive British people 300 miles away from Argentina, the denial of all rights of self-control to these people. Is this the result of imperialist brainwashing? No it isn't. It is much of the truth.

Now it is true that most British workers do not oppose British imperialism. How do we get them to do so? By telling them that they should forget about the considerations listed above and see it in terms of the overall struggle against imperialism? We would have to do that - if it were true. Apart from Morrow all the EC are agreed (more or less) that it isn't.

In a situation of real conflict between imperialism and a colony, neo-colony or sub-imperialist country involving a fight by the latter for its rights, we would proceed by pointing out what the issues were, the injustices being fought against, and arguing that socialists and trade unionists should support the fight and oppose imperialism. We would appeal to them on a common class interest. Nothing like this is possible since no such issues exist in the Falklands dispute.

The idea that the main enemy is in our own country is the core of our politics. It is perfectly rational and understandable to workers faced with Thatcher and Thatcherism. We can explain it rationally. There is no way that we can so explain the 'victory to Argentina' rider that the comrades want to add to it.

The addition of the call for 'victory of Argentina' can only act in the consciousness of thinking British workers against accepting British defeatism on the grounds that the main enemy is at home.

That idea is grounded on internationalism, on the idea of an international interest by workers throughout the world, which will be pursued throughout the world.

In a classic situation of war of imperialism against imperialism, we answer the question 'what if the other side wins?' by talking of our class brothers and sisters on that side of the divide and of their defeatism. We have habitually charged the social patriots on either side of such a conflict with destroying the rational basis of defeatism on the other side, and thus throwing the workers there into the arms of their ruling class.

In any war where there is reason to actively support the opponents of our own ruling class, the internationalist reasoning would be deployed as above, expressed in terms of a class interest in common and of a common interest with the oppressed nation (or whatever) against our own ruling class.

But Leninists in Argentina now should be defeatists because (a) Galtieri's war is a diversion, (b) there is no anti-imperialist content to it, and it will strengthen the allies of imperialism in power in Argentina, (c) they should defend the democratic rights

of the Falklanders, which in the circumstances include the right to secede.

For us to adopt the Argentine nationalism implied in the joint position of Morrow and SJLC cannot be presented in internationalist terms to the British working class - not rationally anyway, not in terms of anything more clear than cloudy notions of a struggle between a secondary imperialist power and a sub-imperialism where we choose to follow Latin American regionalist feeling.

The left and the Falklands crisis

We have stood more or less alone (the SWP has been close to us but has wobbled badly) in maintaining a balanced class position of stark opposition to our ruling class and state, with a refusal to imbibe or spread illusions about their Argentine opposite numbers. We linked up with an Argentine militant in Britain to preach defeatism and international solidarity to the British labour movement.

I think this is a record we have reason to be proud of - if we do not now proceed to 'develop' it into its opposite. We should reject the proposals of SJLC.