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A contribution to the Falklands discussion.....Tendency

The nature of the regime

Both in discussions and in letters to SO, it has become clear that comrades holding the majority position place great emphasis on the nature of the Argentinian regime. Put the other way round, there are comrades who say that we ignore the nature of that regime. As always, use of historical analogies can provide no perfect parallel. But repeatedly, the position held by Trotsky, on numerous different conflict situations, makes one thing completely clear. It is perfectly possible and often necessary for Trotskyists to stand on the side of the most reactionary regime in a struggle against imperialism. The meaning and context of the repeatedly used quote about Brazil can be argued over. But what is quite clear is that Trotsky would have stood on the side of a reactionary regime. There are clear differences between the Falklands conflict and the attempt by imperialist Japan to conquer China. But what cannot be argued over is that Trotsky stood on the side of the mass murderer of communists and workers, Chiang Kai Shek. ?

In the case of China, Trotsky polemicised against the sectarians - who would not draw the correct lines in a real conflict with imperialism because of what they saw as the nature of the regime. In fact, those who based themselves on the nature of the regime could not even properly see the real nature of that regime. For them, revulsion for the regime was enough to take them into a defeatist position. And the same thing is happening with some comrades on the question of the Falklands struggle. *who?* Revulsion for the Argentinian regime is enough to take them into a defeatist position. Of course the revulsion of these comrades is justified. It is a revulsion shared by all who stand in the fight against capitalism. But it is not enough to base our position on. The regimes of the world are not divided into those that revolt us and those that do not. Lenin and Trotsky had to stress this time and again:

"Modern humanity without exception lives under the yoke of imperialism. This must not be forgotten for a single minute. But this does not all mean that imperialism manifests itself equally in all countries. No. Some countries are the carriers of imperialism, others, its victims. This is the main dividing line between modern nations and states." (Writings 38-39 p26).

And we must use this main dividing line to tell us the most important thing about the Argentinian regime in this conflict. It is the regime of a ***non-imperialist nation; it is the regime of a country which is not the carrier, but the victim of imperialism.

The comrades who allow revulsion to determine their position take account of only one factor in the situation. And it is by no means the main factor. Then they measure this minor factor against the test of morality. And they find that it is lacking. And because it is lacking, there are therefore

no circumstances in which they could stand on the same side of a conflict as the junta. This is not the method of Trotsky. It is the method of the sectarians he polemicised against. "So as not to tempt themselves, they simplify reality". And so we can produce a political position, based on the nature of the regime which manages at the same time to leave out the most important point about the nature of that regime. So we simplify reality, so that we will not have to get our fingers dirty by association with the junta. "Both the British and Argentinian regimes are capitalist". Both are anti-working-class. Therefore, we are for the defeat of both".

*guilt
by
association*
Some comrades in the majority have made it clear that they recognise the weakness of such a route to defeatism. Comrade Carolan knows full well that Trotskyists sometimes have to stand with the most reactionary regime against imperialism. But he does nothing to correct the mistakes of some who are led through a route which he knows to be false to his own position. On the contrary- he serves only to make their confusion worse.

*** Comrade Carolan has his own methods of overcoming the problems presented by reality. Firstly, he distorts the nature of the regime, fuelling the belief that it should be viewed first and foremost as a reactionary regime. And then he too simplifies reality to keep his fingers clean. As Trotsky's position makes clear - the reactionary nature of a regime is not enough to lead to an automatic defeatist position. It has to be an imperialist regime. This is not a problem for those to whom reality is only a depressing morass in which nothing genuinely revolutionary is ever done by the masses. Reality may be one thing. But definitions of reality can always be made another. So Argentina comes to be defined in a way which if not exactly saying that it is an imperialist power, suggests that it is something very much like that. We are told that it is 'part of the same imperialist bloc'; that it is an industrial power on a par with Spain etc.

Figures can often be found to produce distorted views of the world. For example, figures can be used to show that some managers are paid less than some skilled workers. But that does not change the nature of their class positions. Likewise, there might be some figures which suggest that Argentina is more of an industrial power than some lesser imperialist country (we have not seen them). But even if they could be found, that would not change the international position of Argentina in the set of imperialist relations. Because, whatever any figures say, they cannot change political reality. And Argentina is economically, militarily and politically dominated by imperialism - not by its own national bourgeoisie - but in particular, by the US imperialists. The whole basis of the economy is subject to the international market over which Argentina has no influence, let alone control and dominance. In fact, the whole country is mortgaged to the imperialist banks. The national bourgeoisie cannot rule Argentina without being propped up by the imperialist powers and the military. Even less can it go out and fight for dominance, to extend its rule internationally, or challenge the dominance of existing imperialist powers. All it can do, and this is something totally different, is compete with the other dominated nations in the region for the trivia left outside of imperialist hands - and also, compete with the other countries to prove itself a better agent and lieutenant for the imperialist generals.

Trotsky recognised that the levels of development of the non-imperialist countries would be completely different. He saw that some of them would reach relatively advanced stages of development. But he saw too that this in itself would not reverse, overthrow or even significantly challenge the dominance of the existing imperialist powers.

"Colonial and semi-colonial countries differ extraordinarily from one another in their degree of backwardness. . . reaching from nomadry up to the most modern industrial culture. The combination of extremes characterises all backward countries. . . With their common economic dependence on the imperialist metropolises their political independence bears in some

instances the character of open colonial slavery (India, Equatorial Africa), while in others it is concealed by the fiction of state independence (China, Latin America). . . . Not a single task of the 'bourgeois' revolution can be solved in these backward countries under the leadership of the 'national' bourgeoisie. . . . Every stage in its development binds it only the more closely to the foreign finance capital of which it is essentially the agency."

The imperialist powers have emerged as such through direct colonial expansion and in wars to divide and re-divide the world. How then, surreptitiously, without any war, after the world has already been divided and re-divided amongst the imperialist powers - how then can Argentina have become anything like an imperialist power? We cannot let the apparent economic development of the country blind us to the political relations of dominance behind which that development has occurred. A level of economic development is not in itself proof of anything - as the quote from Trotsky shows. Nor should we ignore what the real level of economic development of Argentina is - the comparison we have used with Canada is instructive.

We have to conclude that there is only one way that Argentina can come to be seen as anything approaching an imperialist power. That is by being defined as such by those who have to twist reality to fit it into their preconceived determination never to stand in the same camp as the junta. Because, there is only one set of circumstances in which the nature of the regime would determine an automatic defeatism from us. And that is if the regime was an imperialist regime. Comrade Carolan knows full well that Argentina is not an imperialist power - he implicitly makes that clear when he sketches conditions in which we would be for the defence of Argentina against imperialist attack. But rather than clarify the confusion on this issue amongst those who support the majority position, he simply adds to it. We are told that Argentina is 'part of the same imperialist bloc as Britain'. Now either this is a more or less irrelevant truism - or it is to suggest that Argentina is something like an imperialist power itself. But being part of the same imperialist bloc does not make one country as imperialist as another - or even imperialist at all. Apart from the workers states, every country on earth is part of the same imperialist bloc. But as Marxists, we do not only see that things are connected. We see also how they are connected. A capitalist and a worker are connected. They are part of the same relationship of exploitation - the one the exploiter, the other the exploited. And Argentina and the imperialist powers are also connected - they are part of the same relationship of world oppression, the one the oppressor, the other the oppressed. Where does all of this place the Argentinian regime? Not as a sub-imperialism, not like Spain or Portugal. But purely and simply as a lackey, as a servant, as a stooge of the imperialist powers who are its masters.

The fact that a trade union, for example, is under a pro-imperialist leadership does not mean that those who are in the trade union are therefore no longer workers. Likewise, the fact that the people of Argentina are oppressed, not only by imperialism but by their own regime which is the local agent of imperialism does not change the fact that they are a people oppressed by imperialism. Without any distortion or simplification, using the facts and recognising the political relations behind them, we are dealing here with a conflict between an imperialist power, an international oppressor and a dominated neo-colony.

The struggle for national liberation, like the struggle for democratic rights, does not end with formal national independence. There are comrades in the majority who recognise this. They argue that if questions of national liberation were involved, then they would support Argentina against imperialist attack. In so doing, they distance themselves from others in the majority who would argue, consistently, that even if issues of national liberation were involved, any conflict would still be a conflict between two capitalist industrial powers, parts of the same imperialist bloc. Now

Carolán has accused the minority of being 'conjuncturalists' (by which he means that we have based our position on whether to support Argentina against an imperialist attack on whether there was actually an imperialist attack to support Argentina against or not). Of course, in a certain sense, he is right. We believe that our positions should always be conjunctural, in the sense of taking account of changing events. But in fact, it is comrade Carolán who really puts forward a 'conjunctural' position. In the present conflict, Argentina in relation to Britain is part of the same imperialist bloc. But if there were a real invasion from Britain of the Argentinian mainland and an attempt to colonise the country, then we would be for the defence of Argentina. But what has changed? Argentina is either sort of imperialist or it is not. It is either a neo-colony in struggle with an imperialist power, or it is not. The level of economic development, its regional role as a policeman for imperialism, the nature of the junta - all these things the majority use to arrive at their defeatist position. But all of them would still be just as real if there was a full scale invasion. So who is basing a position on conjunctural shifts? For us, Argentina is always a dominated neo-colony. For comrade Carolán, it becomes that only if the imperialists launch a full scale invasion. That is real conjuncturalism - basing our understanding on international relations on whether the imperialists are launching full scale invasion or not. In different circumstances, Trotsky had to take up the same problem of method. He talked of the difficulties of determining our policies according to a stopwatch, rather than in accordance with the basic class camps in the war. He accused Schachtman, who would not defend the Soviet Union because of the nature of the regime, of a contemptible evasion when Shachtman said that he would be for the defence of the Soviet Union in the event of a full scale imperialist intervention.

Now we believe that comrade Carolán is also evading the issue when he says that in the event of a full scale war, he would be for the defence of Argentina. Because the class camp into which Argentina fits in a war against imperialism cannot change, 'according to a stop watch' when that war reaches a certain level. Now we say - we have to determine our position according to the basic class camps, not on conjunctural events.

But again, comrade Carolán has a method of escaping the problem. Before, we have talked of the position which, if carried through to its logical conclusion, would mean that we have reached a new post imperialist era in which the world is being re-divided without anyone noticing (until, at least, the Falklands issue alerted the majority to the emergence of Argentina as an imperialist power). Now we discover a position on national liberation which, if carried through to its logical conclusion would define both the Trotskyist strategy of permanent revolution and the struggle for national liberation out of existence.

We are told by the conjuncturalists that if questions of national liberation were involved, then we would be for the defence of Argentina. But then national liberation is defined to mean only the struggle against direct colonial conquest. By this definition, the struggle for national liberation is over, with only a very few exceptions (Namibia, and the Falkland Islanders against the Argentinian, but not against the British imperialists). To suggest that this is the case is not only ludicrously false. It is also, in passing, to deal a death blow to Trotskyism in most of the world.

Trotsky pointed out that, short of the proletarian revolution, any country would remain under the domination of imperialism, whether directly or indirectly. And the domination of imperialism, the international stage of capitalist decay, would place a brake on the development of backward countries which could never be broken, again, short of the proletarian revolution. In fact, the continued existence of a level of development in the imperialist metropolises would depend on the continuing domination, and the backwardness which it ensured, of the colonial countries. Even after national independence had been won, these relations of political and

economic domination would continue - they would have to continue until they were broken by the proletarian revolution. The starting point for Trotskyist intervention in such countries, as in all countries, would be immediate proletarian needs, and the existing levels of mass consciousness. Even while workers were being exploited by the most developed forms of capitalist production, the struggle for national rights and democratic rights would still be going on. The task of Trotskyists would be to develop these in the only direction in which they could be carried through to victory - the direction of the proletarian revolution. Trotsky repeatedly had to face sectarians who, instead of struggling to intervene in the real struggles which existed, and develop the existing levels of consciousness, substituted their own conception of a genuine workers struggle.

But now the majority comrades discover something else. The only time that the question of national rights would be posed in Argentina is in the event of an imperialist attempt to reassert direct colonial rule. Otherwise, we are told, there is no question of national rights involved in a war with imperialism. Put another way, unless the imperialists create the question of national rights afresh, by invading Argentina, then all questions of national rights have been answered. This has been able to be done, despite what Trotsky thought, without anything like a proletarian revolution. It has been able to be done behind the national bourgeoisie. In the process, they have even managed to become an imperialist power themselves (or a quasi-imperialist power). The struggle in all backward countries (whether or not they have features of the most advanced industrial powers) becomes pure and simple the struggle of workers for exactly those same things that workers in the imperialist countries have to struggle for. Everything else is a diversion from a genuine struggle - chauvinism etc. Now, if this view of things was not being thrust in our face by our own comrades, we would not believe that it could be seriously held. It defines both the world system of imperialism, and the struggle against the national domination that it means right out of existence. It defines the questions which are immediately facing most of the world's population as already answered.

The majority tell us that if questions of national liberation were involved, they would see things differently. But it is only by shutting their eyes to reality that they could possibly avoid seeing what is at the very core of this war. It is a war of imperialist discipline aimed at asserting over a neo-colony the power of the imperialists to decide when and how the state power of that neo-colony is used. It is a war aimed at answering some of the very questions that wars of colonial occupation answered - how do we build a state power which will act to do exactly what we demand in this situation. More than that, it is aimed at asserting that the imperialists, not the Argentinian people, will decide what territory Argentina can regard as its own. There can surely be no comrade who will seriously argue that that has nothing to do with national liberation - or that there is not a neo-colonial question involved.

Part of the very essence of colonialism was the assertion, by military force, of what territory would be under the direct rule of the imperialists. Now it is happening again, and comrades tell us that no question of national rights is involved. Control of the state force, definition of the state territory - decision about what to recover from imperialism - these are all questions of national rights. And they are rights which are being denied to the Argentinian people - denied to them by the massive military force of imperialism. The military power of the Argentinian state is being smashed into the ground precisely because that power is being used under Argentinian control, without the permission or instruction of the imperialists.

This again shows the nonsense involved in calling Argentina an imperialist power (with whatever contortions of terminology). The imperialists are willing to allow Argentina national sovereignty, control of their national state force, even disputes with other states in the area. But at the very

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second that Argentina tries to use her national independence against what the imperialists want, then the sham nature of that independence is there for all to see. Imperialism immediately launches a war of discipline. The realities of national independence are shown - they extend as far as it suits the imperialists.

The comrades in the majority define a new imperialism (or actually, a post imperialism) into existence. They define the ongoing struggle against national domination out of existence. And then they proceed to tell us that we must see the reality of things. But while all of this is going on, a real war is being fought, with little regard to the theoretical contortions and fabrications of the majority. It is a war between imperialism and a neo-colony. It is a war aimed at asserting the right of imperialism to recover by force, in whatever part of the world it chooses, whatever it regards as its own property. And it is a war in which, for reasons that we all agree are the opposite of anti-imperialist altruism, the junta are being forced to stand up against the imperialists. The war has followed the logic, not of those who wish to subject it to a sociological-geographical evaluation which stresses its irrelevance. It has followed the logic of the international balance of class forces and the needs of the international class enemy - the imperialists. It has assumed an international significance. It has passed far beyond the point at which it is particularly important or relevant to discuss whether we are for or against the invasion by Argentina. We now have to decide a position in the face of an invasion from the imperialists. The question was whether we are neutral or not in the face of an imperialist war against a neo-colony to reverse the Argentinian seizure, discipline the anti-imperialist masses, assert its authority and ability to use force, and recover its property. Moral outrage at the nature of the junta; a reflexive resort to self-determination, self-righteous denunciations of the use of force; fabrications of the imperialist power of Argentina; defining the struggle for national fights out of existence the second that independence is won; it is all of these which have led the majority to adopt their position of neutrality. But it is not only through distortion of reality and deep confusion that they have arrived at their position. They also use a form of nationalism which in Trotskyists is a far greater danger than the chauvinism of the Argentinian masses that they are so quick to identify and denounce.

The struggle must be seen in its international context

What is the nationalism we speak of? It is not anything to do with any adaptation to the national bourgeoisie - the imperialist ruling class of Britain. But it is to do with failing to situate the national tasks of any proletariat in the international framework in which they occur. And it is to do with an underlying belief - sometimes partly even expressed, often implicit and hinted, by some of the majority comrades, that Britain is not really a genuine imperialist power. Such a belief, or any hint of it, can only arise in one way - through a blinkered experience of the British ruling class which is restricted to national boundaries. Inside those national boundaries we see and experience the weakness of British capitalism. But that has to do first and foremost not with the collapse of Britain as an imperialist power, but with the escalating decay and rot of the international capitalist system. Inside Britain that may be experienced as a crumbling of power. But right throughout the world, it is being experienced as a tightening of the chains through which British imperialism enslaves millions and millions of oppressed people. If the international capitalist decay of imperialism means that it seems false to see Britain as a developed and advanced country, let it not be forgotten for one single second that in relation to the rest of the world, that is exactly what it is. If the international decay of capitalism means a dramatic fall in living standards in Britain, let it not be forgotten for one single second that it also means an escalation of mass deaths through starvation in parts of the world which provide the British imperialists with enormous profits. Not for one single second can we forget that when we talk about our own enemy being at home, we are doing that precisely because our own enemy is an

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imperialist ruling class. We correctly identify the horrors of the junta, but we must not forget for one single second the price of the bourgeois democracy we 'enjoy'. It is the perpetual backwardness, unbelievable poverty, exploitation to the point of death and beyond of millions of oppressed peoples throughout the world. If we want a balance sheet, then we must not stick with democracy and the junta. We are talking about the cause and the effect - imperialism and British imperialism playing a central role are directly responsible for the lack of democratic rights in many parts of the world. The British ruling class has a history of mass murder - mass murders which continue in different forms today - which makes the junta look nobler in comparison.

Some comrades do not confuse reality only by elevating the junta to the ranks of imperialist powers. Just to make sure, they reduce one of the main imperialist powers in the world to something less than that. Neatly, they arrive at their conflict with two broadly similar parts of the same imperialist bloc. And they are led there by the exact opposite of Trotskyism. They do not situate the conflict in its international context. They deny its relevance, use their own national experience of crumbling British power to produce its mirror image internationally. This may allow comrades to retain their neutrality. It may lead them to preserve their own conception of proletarian independence. But it leads them away from the real world, away from the method of Trotskyism, away from internationalism.

Comrade Carolan correctly points out that there is a difficulty in assessing the international implications of the imperialist attack. The majority position was clearly formulated without encountering that difficulty. It was only pressure from the minority which forced them to address themselves to the international implications of the conflict. It may be, through luck, that we can lift struggles out of the international context in which they occur, and still arrive at the correct position. Just as we may, through luck, be able to arrive at a correct intervention into a LP ward, without any assessment of the balance of forces in the LP. But if we need luck; we also need to avoid relying on it. And luck will never be enough when at the same time, we are using a method which leads us away from the real world. If there is difficulty in assessing the international implications, that does not mean that we should base our position on an assessment of something else. If there is difficulty in assessing the international implications, that does not mean that they lose their primary importance. We have to follow Marx and Lenin and Trotsky who repeatedly made clear that the national policy of a revolutionary party, the course of action followed by the proletariat in one country should be subordinated to international considerations.

Difficult or not, we have to base our position on an assessment of the international meaning of the conflict. Whatever the implications of that for the Argentinian or British proletariat, we have to base our position on the implications for the international struggle against imperialism first. This means that even if a successful defence against Thatcher did strengthen Galtieri, we would still have to call on the Argentinian workers to undertake that defence. In the event however, we believe that a successful defence against imperialism (or victory for Galtieri, as the majority would put it) need in no way necessarily strengthen Galtieri. On the contrary, a successful defence against imperialist attack would open up new opportunities for revolutionaries and the working class, in Argentina, in Britain and internationally.

The international balance of forces

The last period has seen several successes for the anti-imperialist struggle. Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Iran, Nicaragua - the imperialists have been thrown into retreat, the determination and confidence of the anti-imperialist masses has been fuelled. These successes have in turn helped develop a major anti-war feeling, particularly in the US. This has been clearly shown in the mass opposition to any major

escalation of US military involvement in El Salvador. The economic crisis in the imperialist countries has reduced, to almost nothing, the range of options open to the imperialists in terms of buying off any significant section of their own working class or the anti-imperialist masses. This in turn has meant that the local agents of imperialism - the Somozas and the Pahlavis - the imperialist stooges and the weak national bourgeoisies have been able to rely on little direct aid, military or economic, to help prop them up. At the same time, they have been expected by their imperialist masters to subdue the anti-imperialist masses, and to exact from them the price necessary to maintain imperialist profits at a time of international crisis. Weakened by their own economic crisis, politically restricted by the anti-war feeling and hostility in their own working class, forced into harsh battles to make workers pay for their crisis, the imperialists are facing a growing international struggle with increasing desperation. The anti-imperialist masses have been marching forward. But they are physically weakened every day by the struggle to stay alive in the face of imperialist drives to maintain profits, they are subject to constant and brutal attacks by the imperialist puppets struggling to maintain their positions, and they are betrayed by leaders who again and again put their own privileges and relations with the imperialists before the needs of the anti-imperialist masses.

Despite all the anti-imperialist successes, nowhere have anti-imperialist victories been carried through to the building of a workers government. There is thus internationally a very tight balance of forces, tilted by the string of anti-imperialist victories against the imperialists. There can be no doubt about the direction that the imperialists would like to take - the direction that they are forced to look in. They have built their rule and profits on unparalleled barbarism, on the blood and suffering of millions. In their desperation, they will be perfectly ready to defend their rule and profits in exactly the same way. There is no cost, in the blood of humanity, that they would not be willing to pay to control the anti-imperialist struggle, reverse it, take away the gains that they have been forced to concede. That is what Reagan's defence of the right wing regimes of central America is about. That is what Mitterand has been touring Africa to say. That is what Thatcher went to see the Sultan of Oman about. With the enemy forced to become more and more desperate, the anti-imperialist masses can afford to give no ground. In the extremely tight balance of forces that exists, any shift, no matter how slight, could prove costly for the working class internationally.

It is against this background that the war in the South Atlantic needs to be seen. If the anti-imperialist masses were not alerted to the danger, it would be our urgent task to struggle to see that they were alerted. Instead, what is happening. Millions have been aroused in anti-imperialism throughout Latin America and elsewhere. And what are we doing - telling them that the struggle is not really important. The imperialists need to break the anti-war feeling in their own working class. Using Britain as their cutting edge, that is exactly what they are doing. They need to be able to warn their agents that if any of the gains won by the anti-imperialist masses are used against imperialist interests, then those gains will be nullified by imperialist force. They need to blunt the fighting determination of the anti-imperialist masses. They need to be able to break the balance of forces which has left them impotent to use their great military advantage. Again, using Britain as their cutting edge, that is exactly what the imperialists are trying to do.

Now the war in itself guarantees nothing for imperialism. But that is only because the working class and anti-imperialist masses may have the strength to absorb the blow that an imperialist victory would be. But we have to ask our comrades in the majority - how can we who aim to lead the working class to revolutionary victory be neutral about blows from the class enemy against it? Even more so, how can we be neutral about those blows because we think that the workers have the strength to absorb them. Victory for the imperialists does not guarantee that Reagan can unleash the military

intervention in El Salvador that he wants to. But it makes it more likely, not less. Put another way round. A successful defence of Argentina against the imperialist attack does not mean that the imperialists will not launch other attacks. But it means that they will do so from a position in which the balance of forces is tilted even more against them. This type of assessment is for us essential. It is the type of assessment we need to make if we are to have a position of adequate depth and seriousness.

Comrades may argue, as they do, that it is not a genuine anti-imperialist struggle. But we can not pretend for one second that this is not a genuine struggle in which the real balance of forces between imperialism and the anti-imperialist masses is genuinely being tested. Our criticism of the junta for taking the people of Argentina into this struggle may be as deep as we like. Our revulsion for the junta may be total. But *despite* what the junta want, despite what they planned, this struggle has now acquired a significance far more important than the subjective intentions of those who launched it. It has a major relevance precisely because the real balance of forces at the moment is so tight. If we do not look beyond our own national borders, we cannot fail to underestimate the significance of the struggle. If we see Britain in its international role simply as the mirror image of the declining ruling class at home, then we cannot fail to underestimate the international significance of our own ruling class as the international cutting edge for imperialism. It is the balance of forces which gives the struggle its real importance. It is against the balance of forces that we must measure it - not according to our own scale of idealist morality, or abstracted conceptions of what is genuine.

The method of comrade Carolan

The majority comrades do not stand on Trotskyist orthodoxy, so they cannot use it to show us that we are wrong. They whine about supporting the junta. That again does nothing to show that our position is wrong. They complain that some comrades in the minority have changed their position. Again, even if that were true, it does not suggest in any way that the position held by the minority is wrong. They tell us that the examples we use are not exact historical analogies. We agree. That is why we use them to illustrate particular points. But whether they are exact analogies or not does not show how or why we are wrong. And then they tell us that there are in fact many different positions held within the minority. Coming from those who hold the common position for reasons ranging from the belief that Britain is more democratic than Argentina to outright pacifism, we do not feel any particular pressure. But even if there are differences within the minority - and we all stand on a common clearly explained and argued position - that does nothing at all to show what is wrong with our common position.

So comrade Carolan turns in his document to a method of combat which is the traditional resort of those who cannot use orthodox Marxism to support their positions. He constructs a position for us, and proceeds to point out what is wrong with that. So for example, he says that he cannot see the point of being taken in and repeating the lies of Galtieri. No doubt this would score some points in a debate with those who could. But comrade Carolan knows perfectly well that we too cannot see the point of repeating the lies of Galtieri.

By these techniques aimed at stigmatising, rather than showing the weaknesses in an opposition argument, comrade Carolan does little to deepen understanding and discussion in our movement. But he does perform for comrades the useful service of making more of his own position clear. It is a position characterised by a complete inability to recognise and operate on the basis of contradictions in the situation.

We have all agreed that the invasion was motivated, on the part of Galtieri, as a diversion. We have also all agreed that he is lying when he presents the step as a genuinely anti-imperialist action.

But history and the meaning of international struggle do not depend on what Galtieri says. Events have an objective meaning outside the control of those who may have triggered them off. We cannot accept the logic of comrade Carolan which says that if Galtieri says it is anti-imperialist and Galtieri tells lies, therefore there can be no hint of anything anti-imperialist to do with it at all.

The fact is that Galtieri can not successfully do anything to divert the working class - unless what he does speaks at least partly to the anti-imperialist sentiments of the workers. Similarly, he cannot do anything against the interests of imperialism, without that action having any anti-imperialist content at all. There was an element of objective anti-imperialism in Galtieri's move - whatever his motivation. It is impossible to seize something from imperialism without that seizure having any anti-imperialist content at all. And more than that. There is an element of anti-imperialism in the defence of the invasion against imperialism which Galtieri is now, for the meantime, forced to undertake. It is impossible to stand in struggle against an attempt by imperialism to recover its property and assert its authority without that stand having some objective anti-imperialist content. Whatever his motivation, the events set in motion by Galtieri are contradictory.

For us, the contradiction is the basis for a more important one. There is a fundamental contradiction between the sham anti-imperialism of Galtieri, and the genuine anti-imperialism, in part raised by Galtieri himself, of the masses. We do not, of course, claim that the masses of Argentina are all fully conscious in their anti-imperialism. They are not. But the uneven and combined development of neo-colonial countries has a political reflection. And it is this: anti-imperialism is thrust on the masses, even in their immediate day to day struggles. In a very real sense, the real enemy of the Argentinian workers is not at home. It is international imperialism which rules their country, which controls every aspect of their lives, which denies them even bourgeois democracy. The spontaneous anti-imperialist sentiments of the Argentinians reflects this fact, even if that anti-imperialism is not fully conscious, even if it can appear to be manipulated by Galtieri.

Now these contradictions open enormous possibilities for Marxists. They create already significant openings into which a greater and greater wedge can be inserted between the masses and Galtieri. The masses who, as we point out repeatedly, were in developing struggle against Galtieri, will not suddenly have been completely blinded by reactionary chauvinism of Galtieri, although of course they will be affected by it. Now can we possibly believe that the chauvinism of the pro-imperialist Galtieri is the same as the nationalism of the anti-imperialist masses. But Carolan puts the masses into one solid bloc with Galtieri, completely under his control, completely blinded by his lies, completely taken in by his diversion. Where the situation is riddled with basic contradictions, he sees only one thing - reactionary chauvinism under Galtieri. He sees above everything else, that this is not a genuine anti-imperialist struggle. By looking at Galtieri, he makes conclusions based on a complete lack of faith in the genuine anti-imperialism of the masses. He sees them only as a mirror image of their local oppressor. For comrade Carolan, every situation has to be measured against his ideas of what is genuine and what is not. Nothing ever qualifies as genuine. Everything is always overshadowed by the backwardness of the masses. And that is the situation through the eyes of Carolan in Argentina. Everything revolves around the backwardness of the masses and the strength of Galtieri in diverting them. But we cannot base our position on distortions which ignore even basic contradictions. There are enormous opportunities opened up for revolutionary intervention. Almost the entire population is ready to take up arms in defence against imperialism. For us, clearer than anything must be the willingness of the masses to fight against imperialism - the spontaneous anti-imperialism of millions of workers. That situation provides so many opportunities to

drive a wedge between Galtieri and the masses - precisely because Galtieri can never provide a real defence, and because the masses will be more and more ready to respond to a lead which directs them more and more firmly against all aspects of imperialist butchery.

And we must not ignore the urgency of the situation. We have outlined before the dangerous implications of an imperialist victory. For us, it is absolutely crucial that imperialism is stopped. This does not mean for one single second that we think that the existing spontaneity is in itself enough. On the contrary, we are quite sure that it is not enough - it can never be enough to withstand both the military strength of imperialism and the illusions which will be sown and depended by Galtieri and those leaders who have authority in the eyes of the masses. But the fact that it is not enough does not define it out of existence. The fact that it is not enough does not mean that it does not provide a ready-made basis of a progressive nature for intervention. "We do not solidarise ourselves for a moment with the illusions of the masses; but we must utilise whatever is progressive about these illusions to the utmost, otherwise we are not revolutionists, but contemptible pedants" (Spain, p.116).

Of course both the minority and the majority want to drive a wedge between Galtieri and the masses. But in our view, the majority ignore the real position of the masses, the real progressive aspect of their nationalism, the real opportunities opened up by their determination to stage a successful defence against imperialism. And behind all of that, the majority ignore the real threat which imperialism poses. They do not look at the international balance of forces, they do not look beyond the borders of Britain and see the British ruling class not as a decaying second-rate power, but as in the front line of reaction as the cutting edge of imperialism.

The majority are lecturing the Argentinian workers about their chauvinism in precisely those circumstances where it is the nationalism of those under attack from imperialism that is their first line of defence. We should be strengthening that line of defence - developing it in the only direction in which it can be carried through to victory, rather than giving lectures about how backward are the workers and the soldiers in their starting-point of spontaneous anti-imperialism.

It is our task to exploit contradictions in every situation. But we cannot do that if like comrade Carolan we cannot recognise those contradictions in the first place. We cannot do that if we look at the situation, decide that it is not a genuine struggle against imperialism, and then act as if we wish it would go away. There are only two ways that it will go away - either through a successful imperialist victory, or through a successful defence of Argentina against the imperialists. But the majority who follow Carolan are not only guilty of wishful thinking which can never be any guide to action. Their position, if implemented, would be a million times worse than merely irrelevant. They are calling for the withdrawal of Argentinian troops when it is clear to anyone that that would mean an automatic victory to Thatcher and the imperialists behind her. It is a travesty of Trotskyism when we adopt neutrality in a conflict between imperialism and a neo-colony. It is the essence of sectarianism to detach ourselves from the real conflict because neither side fits our concept of a genuinely anti-imperialist force.

The idealism behind the sectarian position

The majority make much of the rights of the Islanders to self determination. (We leave aside the fact that the demand for self-determination was seen as important by Lenin in particular because it was self determination from an oppressive state power and the formation of a new nation state - something which has nothing at all to do with self determination of the islanders for whom it means a guarantee to stay under the control of the imperialists). We believe that in this situation, self-determination

has to be subordinated to the struggle against the imperialist invasion. The basis for doing so from orthodox Trotskyism has been argued in the document on Poland by Comrade Jones. But we would have to be honest in saying that there could not be anything to do with self determination when the Islands are set to become the site of an imperialist garrison. Now it is possible to be for the right of self determination, provided that the Islanders do not call on the imperialist fleet, provided that the Islands are not used as an imperialist garrison. That is what many of the comrades in the majority seem to believe, although they have been a little reticent in saying that openly. But what does this position do - it lays conditions on our support for the right to self determination - it subordinates that right to considerations of what it means in relation to imperialist forces and imperialist aggression. But that is precisely what we in the minority do openly. We say quite clearly that we do not accept the right of the Islanders to call on the imperialist fleet to protect them. We also say that in the existing and in the foreseeable circumstances, that is exactly what the right to self determination would actually mean. Therefore, we cannot support that right in a situation where it is nothing more or less than a cover for the imperialists to launch their attacks. We say this openly and we include it in our position - rather than doing what some in the majority do. They say privately that they do not accept the right of the Islanders to call for imperialist protection - but then they say openly that they support the right of the Islanders to self-determination when they know full well that it means calling on the imperialists for protection.

It is true therefore that our position has as its cost the right of the Islanders to self-determination. But that is not simply our choice - it is a reality imposed by the conflict. It is true that the Islanders are victims - but they are victims first and foremost of imperialism which has created this situation, created this war and has used the Islanders as its pawns the whole way through. We find it strange that comrade Carolan who is so quick to denounce the chauvinism of the Argentinian masses is way off mark when it comes to recognising the overt pro-imperialism which blinds the Islanders and confirms them as loyal pawns of the imperialists. We find it equally strange that comrade Carolan who has based so much on the subjective intentions of Galtieri - to the point of giving them a power in the situation which they could never have, ignores completely the subjective intentions of the Islanders to the point of completely denying the pro-imperialist power that their self determination would have. It is strange that a comrade who is willing to rush into accusations about the nature of the thinking of the Argentinian masses should so easily be able to leave out the major point of the Islanders' conception of themselves. Much is listed, but what is left out is that they are a distinct community which regards themselves as distinctly British.

Now it is possible in drawing room politics to draw neat models which have no point of contact with reality. But neither we nor comrade Carolan and the majority are involved in that sort of politics. We must make sure that we do not use its methods. We cannot ignore contradictions, elevate some surface appearances to a significance out of all proportion, ignore some other aspects of reality, and then seriously expect to arrive at a position for concrete intervention. Arguing against sectarians, Trotsky had to warn against exactly these things - things which are all contained within the majority position.

Right throughout in fact, the position of the majority reflects a strong influence of idealism - and idealism is the opposite of the Marxist method. For the idealist, Marxism is at best a set of ideas. The struggle for Marxism becomes the struggle to intellectually convince others of the truth of those ideas. Invariably, this leads the idealist away from workers and the struggle for 'truth' becomes suspended above the actual class struggle. For, as is the case in the Falklands, the actual class struggle in one country or internationally is always much more messy and

'unpure' than the idealist wants. It is never genuine. It is always much more unpure than the Marxist wants as well. The difference is that the Marxists see in the existing conflicts the progressive points for intervention, the points which can be developed in a revolutionary direction. The idealist sees only the distance between his or her idea of truth, and what is actually happening. For the idealist, the only thing that is really genuine is his or her ideas. But we say that those ideas are irrelevant, unless they are taken through intervention into the class struggle. Idealism may seem fine when the question is one of discussion with left reformists. We can always give them our picture of truth, and show how reality deviates from it. But the same idealism means ultimatism and sectarianism when we try to use it as a basis for intervention. Or, more often than not, we try to use it as a substitute for intervention. If they are objective about it, the majority comrades will see that this is what has happened as far as their position in relation to Argentinian workers and soldiers is concerned. The main thing that we have to offer them is a lecture about how wrong their ideas are. We have made propaganda about our goals, without showing workers a way of moving from their existing levels of consciousness and their existing actions, to those goals. We stress again, so that there can be no confusion, that we are in no way bowing to the existing level of consciousness of the Argentinian workers. On the contrary, we are trying to understand it fully, to see the contradictions within it precisely so that we will be able to develop it in a revolutionary direction. But instead of that, we, through the majority, come to hold a position which, if put into practice, would mean exactly the opposite of what we say we want most - the defeat of imperialism. Our position for the withdrawal of the Argentinian troops could never mean that - all it could mean is an easier victory for Thatcher. Neither our weakness in method, nor the disastrous consequences of our policy go away when we wrap them up with revolutionary propaganda. Propaganda which makes no connection with the existing situation does not correct the faults of idealism. On the contrary, it is exactly because the majority are using idealism that they can come to produce propaganda which has no connection with reality. It is propaganda which either ignores, or tells the workers to reverse the main factor which arouses them at the moment - their spontaneous hatred of imperialism. It is propaganda which calls for an immediate revolution (funnily enough, when it is the majority who are stressing how much the workers have been diverted) without basing that call on the existing mass mobilisations.

The comrades in the majority have seen the position that we would argue to Argentinian workers. It is a position which connects very directly with the existing level of spontaneous anti-imperialist militancy. Comrades may think what they will of it. But they cannot seriously argue that it fails to take up the question of deepening the wedge between Galtieri and the masses. They cannot seriously argue that it fails to show a way forward to deepen and extend towards the building of a workers government, what exists at the moment. They cannot really argue that it fails to give us a class based program for intervention.

We know that there are some comrades who devalue the idea of our preparing and developing an interventionist position for Argentina. They correctly see their own irrelevance in the situation. But for Trotskyists, our own irrelevance does not free us, so that we can hold positions based on misconceptions, arrived at by the wrong methods, and disastrous in their objective consequences. How can we seriously be struggling for any relevance inside the working class anywhere if we are incapable of seeing the actual situation as it is and a way forward in that situation, even if we are not yet leading the workers involved? Today we are inevitably isolated because the mass of the working class is under the leadership of the Stalinists and reformists. But this does not mean that we have to become confirmed in and strengthen that isolation, adopting methods which can never break it down or end it. But that is precisely what the majority comrades are doing when they look at the Argentinian workers and soldiers and see only their leaders and their wrong ideas. That is exactly what they are doing when they see the only role for us as explaining what is wrong with the ideas of the

spontaneously anti-imperialist masses. No, we must start off by recognising what is progressive in that spontaneous anti-imperialism. We must start off by seeing the lines which are already existing between Galtieri and the masses, rather than by breaking those lines down and seeing only one chauvinist mass.

We must beware the pressure to look for ready-made struggles which fit some abstracted notion of what is genuine. There are always mistakes and elements of backward thinking in the working class, there always will be while they are under reformist and Stalinist leaders. But we cannot retreat from those situations, we have to prepare ourselves to move into those situations. We have to see what is progressive beneath the surface and bring it to the fore. Now, time and again it seems that we can do this when we intervene in Britain. Never do we see the workers as completely victims of the ideas of their leaders. Never do we base our assessments of struggle on the immediate subjective intentions of those who lead them. We always look for and point to the underlying class dynamic. We never base ourselves on the assessment that those struggles which are undertaken are not genuine. We always look for the progressive element in them to develop. Then that is how it must be with all struggles, everywhere. There is nothing especially genuine about a workers struggle because it occurs in the framework of a trade union, rather than an anti-imperialist mass movement. Its meaning is given to it, not by its organisational framework, not by those who lead it, but above all, by the balance of forces, by the mobilisation, by the issues which are expressed, in whatever distorted form in it, by the workers who are aroused through it.

2. If we believe that the only genuine workers struggles can occur under reformist leaderships of one kind, instead of reformist leaderships of another, then we are making a bad mistake. We are making the same mistake if we believe that the only genuine workers struggles which can occur are within the framework of the type of workers organisation which has been consolidated in the most advanced countries. The only thing that we can say about workers struggles in mass reformist trade unions, and workers struggles in mass reformist anti-imperialist movements is that they are likely to occur in different parts of the world - the former in the more advanced, the latter in the more backward. Broadly speaking, the type of organisation through which workers struggle mirror the level of development of the society. It would be a strange kind of Marxism indeed which suggested that the only genuine struggles were those which could occur only in the more advanced countries. This is not in any way to suggest that independent workers organisations are not one of the most important factors in any struggle. But it is to suggest that workers struggles can take on levels of independence which are not based on the types of organisation that existed the day before. And it is to suggest the level and form of organisation of the working class will not in themselves decide whether the struggles of workers are genuine or not. We cannot throw away Trotsky and the understanding of the political implications of uneven and combined development, so as to be able to dismiss the anti-imperialism in Argentina as not genuine.

Behind the surface in Argentina, there are the makings of a completely genuine anti-imperialism. It can be brought to the fore in the struggle to defend against the imperialist attack. Put another way, it will receive a heavy blow if, at the very moment it is most aroused and widespread, the spontaneous anti-imperialism of the masses is confronted by an imperialist victory - an action in which imperialism shows its ability to recover its property and discipline those who act against it. Comrade Carolan does not see this. In fact, he cannot. All he can see is the junta, and its victory, and its defeat. The masses are a mere shadow or mirror image - a mindless, directionless completely controlled passive tool in the hands of Galtieri. But in reality, it would never be the junta who defeated the imperialists. It would always be the soldiers, the real conscripts, fuelled maybe by illusions about Galtieri, maybe the victims of national chauvinism, but fuelled also in their determination by a deep and widespread spontaneous

anti-imperialism. A victory against the imperialists would fan the flames of anti-imperialism. More than that, it would create better and better conditions for Trotskyists to point to the anti-imperialist strength of the armed masses and their ability to take everything they need from imperialism. Comrade Carolan does not and cannot see this because he is blinded by what he is looking at - not the anti-imperialism of the masses (because it is not genuine) but the chauvinism of Galtieri, which he then transfers to the masses.

The majority position causes some confusion amongst comrades. Is it a war between two broadly similar capitalist powers? Is it a war between an imperialist power and a non-imperialist country? Is it a war between two broadly similar capitalist powers which will lose their broad similarities if the one tries to invade the other? Is it a war between declining imperialism and sub-imperialism? All these positions and others are held amongst the majority. That is why they are now beginning to reveal an opposition to the TILC position. In this context, SO has done a disservice. It has, in an attempt to equalise our horror at Galtieri and Thatcher, failed completely to show the real link between the imperialist puppet Galtieri and the imperialist masters for whom Thatcher now acts. If there are comrades who start thinking that things under Britain would be better, or start thinking that it is the Argentinians who have denied the right to self determination and conclude that in some way it might be restored under the British, then we cannot really be surprised. The product of idealism, fabrication, distortion and separation from reality are never surprising in the depths of confusion they produce.

But on this question, we cannot just look and see whether Galtieri is likely to fall. As the majority comrades point out, we are first and foremost concerned with workers struggles. We cannot arrive at our positions of intervention by basing ourselves on thinking (especially when it is idealist wishful thinking) on what is likely to happen above the heads of workers. Nor can we base our position on the desire to see Galtieri fall. We have to base our position, insofar as it relates to Galtieri's hold on power, on our desire to see the working class bring him down. Demoralised, suffering large casualties, the victims of bloody imperialist discipline - the working class will have no automatic advantage if Galtieri is brought down to be replaced by another Galtieri. Because Galtieri as an individual is not important. What is important is the class and the social layer on behalf of whom he rules - the capitalists and the military. There could be no benefit if Galtieri fell, to be replaced by his shadow, above the heads of the demoralised workers. More than that, it is precisely in such circumstances, after they have stood together against the imperialists and lost, that workers can most easily be turned against workers as opportunists jockey for position above their heads.

Whatever position we emerge with, it must be agreed that we are not just standing on the side lines, hoping that Galtieri gets smashed. We have to give that hope real content - by whom, under what circumstances, through what process.

But there is more than that. We must recognise that the imperialists who prop up the Galtieri regime would be strengthened - in their direct influence over the regime, through any defeat of Argentina. Galtieri might go, but the capacity of the imperialist to prop up the regime that follows would not - on the contrary, it would be many times greater. Already we see the imperialists starting the process of appointing the successor to Galtieri - with Lami Doso as the favourite at the moment. Even more do we see how questions of national rights are involved when we see the imperialists getting ready to use their war as the means to appoint the next Argentinian government.

But as we have argued, a defeat for the imperialists, even if delivered under the army command of Galtieri, would open up possibilities which are the exact opposite - possibilities for a working class emboldened by a

success it sees as its own to move forward. And such a victory would quite likely mean the downfall of Thatcher. Even if they think that Argentina is on a par with Britain, the majority comrades will surely accept that the British have a far more important international role as a primary carrier and protector of imperialism. This means that the nature of the British regime is a question of immediate international importance because the British ruling class is an imperialist ruling class. Instead of blinding ourselves to this fact by nonsense about the declining role of Britain, we should be making quite clear the great danger of a bloodthirsty regime, emboldened by military victory half way across the world, strengthened by the failure of any significant working class opposition and the active support of the Labour leaders to the anti-imperialist mass internationally. It seems almost inconceivable that we should choose this moment, when British imperialism has launched the biggest post-war invasion force half way across the world and is in the process of winning a bloody victory, to announce that British power is declining. The Argentinian workers and those millions of others whose suffering is more acute each day because of the tightened chains of British imperialism would laugh in our faces and tell us to come down from our cloud.

Ultimatism does not make the weaknesses of the majority go away - it makes them worse. The majority comrades in effect call for an immediate general strike and a revolution. But in reality, they do believe that the Argentinian workers can free themselves of the backward reactionary chauvinism. In other words, they know that they are putting forward an ultimatism position which can make no material impact on the Argentinian workers. Behind their ultimatism is a deep pessimism about the capacity to respond to any progressive leadership of the Argentinian workers. We do not call for an immediate revolution. But where the majority can see only problems, weaknesses and backwardness, we see contradictions, the real progressive element of mass mobilised spontaneous anti-imperialist sentiments, and a real way forward from the starting point which actually exists. Because whether we like it or not, the whole Argentinian working class (with the tiny exceptions discovered by defeatists in the British left) regard themselves as in an anti-imperialist struggle. The majority have made too much of a distorted view of the way in which the islanders see themselves. Now it is time to take proper account of the struggle that the Argentinian working class see themselves as fighting. They have created a starting point which, with all its contradictions, we can ignore only if we are sectarians. The fact is that there is never created a perfect situation of struggle. The working class does not everywhere comprise only conscious revolutionaries. We are not everywhere in the leadership of the working class. Those two facts mean that if we want to have anything to do with the struggles of workers, we have to start off from the ungenuine, messy, non-real struggles which workers themselves are in. That is how it is. But that is only part of the story. The other part is that even with their backward consciousness, even behind their reformist leaders, workers are still the revolutionary class, they are still thrown into struggles which can be developed in a revolutionary direction, there are always progressive elements in their spontaneous militancy. We create for ourselves a method and a role which guarantees our own irrelevance. We sit and talk to each other about an idealised, distorting, irrelevant and simply false idea of truth, while the real truth is being created in the real world - in the struggles which actually exist.

We say to all our comrades: the majority define a post imperialism into existence. They define the struggle for national rights and democratic demands out of existence. They present a view and conception of the struggle and the role of the British ruling class which is based on a distorted view restricted to within national borders. They have no real position for the Argentinian workers - and then try to compensate by abstracted propaganda and ultimatism which make things worse. They freeze the masses and Galtieri into one static bloc and cannot see who is going where. They reject the masses in struggle as chauvinist because of the nature of their leaders. These are the features of sectarianism - they are the features of a method which would at best confirm our own irrelevance for all time. We must reject them.

11.6.82