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

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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. 2

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. *W20?* 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".

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