
I N T E R N A L B U L L E T I N N O . 8

JULY 1982

National Committee 25.4.82: short minutes

National Committee 16.5.82: short minutes

A contribution to the debate on the Falklands Kendall

Imperialism, national oppression, and the
Falklands/Malvinas war: Some questions to the
majority and minority Ellis

Permanent revolution: notes as background to
the amendments to the TILC resolution on
Central America Kinnell
(Note: The amended resolution is in the TILC
bulletin no.1. The unamended version will be
published in the next IB).

Letter on the Malvinas war Chris E.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE: APRIL 25 1982:

Chorley, Collins, Grassac
Attendance: Booth, Cunliffe, Eliot, Fraser, Gable, Gardiner, Hill,
Jagger, Jones, Kendall, Kinnell, Levy, Maddox, Matthews, Noonan,
Parkinson, Picton, Traven, Wheeler, Whittling, Wolf.

Plus: Ellis, O'Brien, Tuka, Dale A, Chris B, Andrea C, Judy G,
Mike G, Colin H, Will A, Callaghan, French, Dave A.

Apologies: Booth (part of meeting: elections), Armstrong (TU),
Gardiner (part: elections), Harding (TU), Hunt (YCND), James
(work), Keith (TSC), Khan (Holiday), Lewis (shifts), Morrow (ill),
Oliver (work), Parsons (domestic), Piggot (ill), St John (ill),
Smith (ill), Wheeler (part: S.Afr. meeting).

Absent: Gunther, Harrison, Hotchkiss, Johnson, Macdouglass, McVicar,
O'Toole, Pearson, Riel, Stevenson.

1. OXFORD RESIGNATIONS

Levy reported for the EC. Two NC members - Todd and Connolly -
and 2 other comrades had resigned in Oxford. EC was fighting for
them to re-join. East Midlands Area Ctee had proposed a closed
session of the NC on this. The EC advised against.

Grassac moved the E.Midlands Area Ctee proposal.

Kinnell moved that the discussion be adjourned until later on the
agenda when Chorley could report on discussions with Todd.

Kinnell's motion carried, 8 votes to 7.

2. TEBBIT CAMPAIGN

Levy reported for the EC. Discussion.

3. FALKLANDS

Hill from the chair asked if anyone wished to take up the
Merseyside resolution (see IB 5).

Phil S moved the Merseyside resolution.

Kinnell opposed for the EC.

Merseyside resolution defeated, no votes for, all other comrades
against bar 2 abstentions (Grassac, Wheeler).

A straw poll was taken of all comrades present. 7 voted for the
Merseyside resolution, but it was defeated overwhelmingly.

4. SUMMER SCHOOL

Kinnell proposed ideas from the EC on the general format.

Discussion.

EC proposals carried unanimously.

5. OXFORD RESIGNATIONS DISCUSSION RESUMED

Chorley gave a supplementary report.

Discussion.

Grassac moved a closed session of the NC to discuss issues arising:
motion defeated, with 5 votes for.

Chorley moved a special NC, with the resigned comrades invited, on
May 1. Motion defeated on a tied vote: 8-8.

AGAINST: Carolan, Chorley, Collins, Fraser, Gardiner, Gunther, Harrison, Hill, Jagger, Keith, Kendall, Khan, Kinnell, McVicar, Matthews, Oliver, Parkinson, Parsons, Pearson, Whetling, Wolf. (20)

Smith announced that he would form a tendency on the basis of the defeated position.

Nottingham resolution calling for support for Argentine claim to the Malvinas: defeated.

FOR: Booth, James, Morrow, Wheeler and one other (5).

AGAINST: 18

3. NHS PAY

Chorley reported.

4. LETTER FROM GABLE

- received, resigning from the NC. Agreed (1) to refer the matter to the EC, (2) to ask Booth to talk to Gable.

NOTE TO E.C. MINUTES

Hill has requested that mention be added to the EC minutes of May 9 that he reserved the right to take the Falklands war issue to the NC.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE ON THE FALKLANDS

For an epoch is a norm of varied phenomena in which, with the typical there is always something else, from a letter to Zinov' VI 35

This document, written in support of the NC majority, has two main points - to reiterate the majority position and to show that the minority position is not only outlined in their document, but also in the present situation for a global scenario which neither aids understanding of the nature of the present conflict, nor of the implicit ramifications as expressed in their perspective.

There is not time to go into the many major, though in the context of this debate, secondary, issues which it has raised. However, I would make one general point about the capacity of the Marxist movement to deal with issues such as imperialism. It is nearly 70 years since the basic analysis and debate over the development of monopoly capitalism and imperialism took place, and the analysis put forward by Lenin remains the bedrock of our understanding. The permutations of history - such as the distortions of Stalinism and Facism (to which the autarchy of Argentina through Peronism can be directly traced) - have become far greater. This to my mind has left Marxists without a theory of imperialism which adequately interprets the post-war world.

The position restated: Carolan has defined the majority position as follows:

'Both the British imperialist government and the Argentinian sub-imperialist military dictatorship are concerned to assert their prestige and strength by siezing the islands' (P2)

In defining Britain as imperialist, and Argentina as sub-imperialist, we are saying the war is not inter-imperialist. The question of support for Argentina has also been ruled out because we don't see the Falklands as an integral part of Argentina, therefore, the possible progressive element in the situation, that it is an anti-colonial struggle, is lost. Accordingly, we have designated it as reactionary, 'a war fought for prestige': this was, and is, our assessment despite the escalation. This provides the starting point, the central axis from which our analysis of secondary and conjunctal events flows. Central to the present time is the question of the war. Simply, from our definition of the war as reactionary, we have derived our position of defeatism. For both British and Argentinian class-conscious workers 'the enemy is at home'.

Anyone who wishes to disagree with this stand-point has to show one of two things: a) our original analysis was incorrect which can only be achieved by showing that the Falklands are an integral part of Argentinian nationality or b) that the escalation of the war has seen a qualitative change in the situation; this I believe is the intention of the tendency.

But in no way do they prove, rather they leave the ground of concrete analysis for speculation and scenarios on a global scale. The tendency's document in effect reduces the question of a definition of the invasion - and even the point they say they stand on, - the war, - to secondary considerations concerning a possible global scenario of the implications of the present action. This is not only fundamentally incorrect politically but it has led to the telescoping and amalgamating of issues. Not least of these is the whole question of sovereignty.

What if the Falklands were Argentina's?: If the majority had drawn that conclusion (I believe it to be ludicrous) we would have supported the invasion, in fact, welcomed it because, whether or not it was an adventure to head off the working class, it would have been a progressive, if slightly anachronistic, anti-colonialist struggle. Anyone who didn't support it would at best have confused the question of support for this with that of support for the Junta (a typical liberal failing); at worst, would be guilty of a 'social chauvinist deviation'. In such a context the long quotes from Trotsky used by the tendency would have been applicable (though relating to a very different world).

These quotes were informed by Lenin's analysis of imperialism and self-determination. By fusing Marx' understanding of capitalist development with the new phenomena of imperialism in the age of monopoly capitalism Lenin could conclude:

'One of the most basic features of Imperialism is that it accelerates the development of capitalism in the most backward countries and thereby widens and intensifies the struggle against national oppression... It follows from this that imperialism often gives rise to national wars' (Collected works VI 35)

The core of Lenin and Trotsky's analyses rests on the impact of imperialism on backward countries providing the material conditions for national struggles. It is this whole national dynamic which provides the progressive content of colonial struggles, and why, even under Chiang kai-Shek, 'Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive'. For that to happen you have to have a national question which, in this concrete situation, we have concluded is not the case. Of course, to argue that the Falklands are part of Argentina is possible. It is an argument which stands separately from the position of the tendency but has been interwoven with their arguments.

Reaction turned to progress when the shooting started?: The tendency have progressed towards their global speculations through the TILC resolution:-

'While recognizing that the present conflict is restricted to the Falklands issue, in the event of a full scale war we would unquestionably support Argentina'

Carolán and the EC members of the tendency can argue about what is meant by the resolution; it seems irrelevant and comrades should refer to Cunliffe's interpretation, as he wrote it. The important fact is that we have two different positions on what the war means. There can be no doubt that it is a war: Britain has already lost more R.N. tonnage than in the first year of WW11.

The war however remains one between Britain and Argentina over the Falklands, not over Argentinian sovereignty. There is a major difference here which the tendency seems to ignore. For them once the shooting started Argentina stopped being a reactionary force and became suddenly progressive. The war in and of itself had qualitatively changed the situation. For their part, they say the majority has a contradictory position:

'They (the majority) question whether Argentina is in fact a non-imperialist power and define it as sub-imperialist... Trotsky's position would only apply in the case of an invasion of the Argentinian mainland aimed at the conquest and military suppression of Argentina' (P4)

We are told that these positions are contradictory, the former backing up a view on the NC that Argentina is a middle ranking capitalist power little different from Britain, and, secondly, 'in a war of conquest against Argentina it would be regarded as fundamentally different and Trotsky's view would apply'.

We have already dealt with the question of there being a difference between imperialism and sub-imperialism. But is it not clear that Argentina is a relatively highly developed capitalist power? Argentina has a 72% urban population, one of the largest cities in the world, a well-developed working and middle class and the ability to fly high tec planes and sink a large proportion of British navy - not, in my view, the identikit of a backward country. The second point raised is more important because it shows a fundamental misunderstanding of imperialism. When we talk of a war against Argentina we mean a qualitative change from the present conflict to one direct against Argentina itself. We are defining war, not by the numbers involved or its intensity, but by the reasons for which it is entered on, i.e. 'war is the continuation of politics by other means'. Why should Britain wish to attack Argentina? There are not that many reasons - to stop the junta breaking from imperialism; to change the economic relationship with imperialism i.e. re-assert Britain's hegemony over the U.S.; to support the junta against a proletarian revolution. These reasons would represent a war to maintain imperialist domination against a back-drop of a strategic break-down in the relation between Argentina and imperialism. It is these reasons which would bring into play the central question of defencism. National liberation can only be defined in relation, and in opposition, to imperialism. The essential point is that imper-

ialism does not need, or wish, to change the present situation; the junta are doing is a very good job. The whole trajectory of the tendency in defining the war as anti-imperialist means they have back-tracked on the basic question of sovereignty in an attempt to prove their contention of support for Argentina.

However, they attempt to square the circle; we are told:

'Argentina is subject to national domination by imperialism. National rights are involved. The rights of a non-imperialist nation to recover what it thinks is its property from imperialism without having to face attack and discipline from the military force of imperialism' (my emphasis) (P4 Para 3)

There seems little point in us holding any independent position or assessment of the world, and certainly no point in attempting to act upon it, if we bow the knee, not to Argentina's national rights which we perceive and have understood from a Marxist viewpoint but to 'what it thinks is its property'. Perhaps the following parallel will help illustrate the fallacy of such an approach to politics: most workers in Britain are racist, many think that black people should be 'sent back home'; such ideas come from a decaying imperialist power and represent part of ruling class ideological penetration of the working class. While the motives for Argentinian workers' support for the invasion has a progressive element in it this has been moulded and shaped by a bourgeoisie caught between imperialism and autarchy, directly expressed through Peronism. Both phenomena are obviously different. However, for Marxists they have a common denominator - both represent a false consciousness of the class which we argue against and attempt to change.

Even on the tenuous ground the tendency stands on they are not being consistent. Everyone knows, from the start, of the mass support for the invasion so why was the call for support not made then? The answer is, I believe, found in the following...

'without having to face attack from the military force of imperialism'

In this manner the tendency throws overboard any Marxist definition of sovereignty, self-determination or the political issues in the war. They allow the fact of the British fleet to determine how they see the war. It is this, or more precisely the scenario they draw from it which determines their politics.

Vietnam in reverse? : The core of their analysis is found in the proposition -

'Britain is doing what the U.S.A. was unable to do in any real sense since the Vietnam war - to impose its will on a non-imperialist power.'

This argument is to all intents and purposes the same as that put forward by the RWL over Afghanistan (though with more urgency). We cannot call for withdrawal because to do so would be lining up with imperialism. Imperialism is attempting to reverse its set-backs since Vietnam; the Falklands are part of its attempt to re-impose its control. It is this proposition around which their analysis is developed. I have intended to point out the fallacies this has created in their argumentation, not least this has meant their seeing the world in terms of blocs rather than the perspective of independent class politics. The tendency put forward the following as their basic idea:

'a victory for Britain would increase the confidence of world imperialism in using military force and would begin to establish the use of military force against non-imperialist nations as the norm. Whilst a defeat for Britain would deny the imperialists such a boost and emphasise their inability to use force successfully' (P7/8)

While this issue is of major importance for Marxists, and will of course have an effect on the political situation we cannot, as I believe the tendency have done, derive our analysis from it, however horrendous the implications may be. On this issue also I feel there is a considerable gap between the tendency and the majority. This is expressed in a different assessment on a whole range of 'secondary' issues such as British imperialism.

As a world military power Britain was at its zenith at the turn of the century, WW1 saw the beginning of an historical decline, as US imperialism began its ascendancy. This decline was the basis of Trotsky's analysis of Britain in the twenties, and the potential war with the U.S.

The eclipse of British imperialism was completed after WW2. A whole process of decolonisation began to take place (remarkably smoothly from the imperialist point of view). This threw up new permutations and questions for Marxists, as well as a number of anachronisms for imperialism, Northern Ireland and the Falklands to name but two.

Decolonisation represented both the changing modus operandi of imperialism under the hegemony of the U.S. and the decline of British capital. With this came a change in role for the British military. Britain no longer ruled the waves, the slap on the wrist administered by the U.S. over Suez brought this point home. Also there began an economic shift as capitalism began to look away from its traditional markets to Europe, an essential move in developing a viable cartel to challenge the U.S. and Japan. Against all the jingoism of sections of capital, their foot soldiers the petit bourgeoisie and the dreamers of autarchy on the left, Britain redefined its economic role, after it had admitted military decline. Britain is a military power geared to the European theatre of war. It is one of the reasons Britain has been attempting to ditch the Falklands, it is why the cruiser which used to patrol the South Atlantic had been withdrawn and why, if the Junta had waited another six months, Britain would not have been able to launch such an operation as the carriers would have been sold. The issue of maintaining conventional role as opposed to a major Euro-centred nuclear striking force has 'split' the Tories, as witnessed by the resignation of Speed. I do not see how the jingoism of the petit bourgeois dreamers who look back on Britain's past glories can succeed in winding the clock back; not only is British capitalism incapable of such a project but it goes against their over-all class interest and the strategic interests of imperialism. It seems to me that any potential change in Britain's role, which is conceivable after the present venture, has to be seen within the above context, not how the tendency sees it as the restoration of Palmerstonian gun-boat diplomacy.

Support for the Argentinian working-class?: Their scenario which has denied their position on the characterization of the invasion finds a parallel contradiction over the question of the working class. Their opening argument against defeatism is ...

'the very different material conditions prevailing in Britain at present as against those facing the Argentinian workers'

a situation which has triggered off an anti-imperialist struggle. It is in this context that a 'victory to Argentina will create better conditions for the struggle to out Galtieri' (P2 para 1). Later in the document we are told, quite correctly, of the necessity to find a point of contact with the most advanced workers which can only be done by defending Argentina against imperialism. These arguments are quite legitimate for those who see an anti-imperialist struggle taking place over the Falklands. This is summed up in the advanced workers' slogan 'Galtieri No! Malvinas, Yes!' How can the tendency support such a slogan when they don't support the invasion - necessarily, in opposition to those advanced workers, who they quite rightly want to relate to? On the concrete issue, they state that the Argentinian workers have no interest in the armed occupation of the Falklands against the wishes of the population. Once again it is the tendency's scenario which over-rules the problem of supporting something they don't agree with... But in the present conditions it would be worse for the masses of Latin America as a whole if we were to concede a victory to armed imperialist aggression (P9 point 4). We will pass over the implied point that the majority are conceding anything to imperialism. This scenario leads the tendency to the abandonment of any critical political comprehension of the situation. Surely, the point at issue is this - if you wish to relate to the class you have to base that on being ready to tell the truth, however unpalatable that may seem at the time.

Plusses and Minuses: The other side of this argument rests on the question of strengthening imperialism. I have already taken issue with the tendency's appreciation of Br. imperialism; the other examples they give to support their argument are - 'Reagan was forced to openly state his position. The USA is now clearly backing Thatcher' and '... to use the EEC as a pro-imperialist bloc' (P8 Para 2). From this they derive that to call for a withdrawal of troops now the war has started 'would hand Thatcher a massive victory on a plate'; this more than anything else is a return of the Afghanistan argument. The tendency is intent on putting a plus where our enemies put a minus. I also wonder who else but Britain Reagan would plan to support, and how the EEC would act if not in a pro-imperialist manner?

Conclusion:

In this document I have attempted to tackle some of the substantive issues, and show what I perceive to be the inconsistencies of the tendency's position. I hope that this, as with other contributions to the debate, will clarify the areas of disagreement and deepen the WSL's understanding of the very important issues the debate has given rise to.

Kendall

IMPERIALISM, NATIONAL OPPRESSION AND THE FALKLANDS/MALVINAS WAR:
SOME QUESTIONS TO THE MAJORITY & MINORITY.

A great many confusions have arisen from what has now become a tendency fight in the WSL, with neither the majority nor the minority exactly specifying what their positions mean in practice for the Argentine Workers movement. Clearly what is at stake is our whole assessment of contemporary imperialism. Neither side in this debate actually put forward a theoretical position on imperialism. Obviously the middle of a war isn't the time for a massive theoretical debate (though Lenin produced his pamphlet in 1916), but what is increasingly clear is that the Trotskyist movement's lack of any theoretical work on imperialism has now come home to roost with a vengeance.

At the heart of the IMG position - and presumably that of Morrow - is the notion that the world capitalist system is neatly divided into 'imperialism' and 'oppressed nations' (flowing from the view that post-war decolonisation made no difference to the structure of imperialist domination, 'formal political control' being all but irrelevant). The minority, who quote statistics in the Argentine economy, insist that Argentina is 'dependent', 'an oppressed nation', ETC. - presumably following this general view (though initially I think most of us were agreed that Argentina is a 'middle-ranking capitalist power' - Cde. Smith (?) certainly said so in public).

On the other hand, it is alleged that the majority, flowing from the view of Argentina as a 'middle ranking capitalist power', & Britain as a 'declining imperialist power', conclude that there is little difference between them.

Both these views are confused. What they do is to identify imperialist domination with national oppression. Once this identification is made, it logically follows either that if a country is dominated by imperialism it is therefore nationally oppressed; or that if a country is not nationally oppressed then it is not dominated by imperialism.

National oppression has nothing to do with the relative strength of a national bourgeoisie vis à vis other bourgeoisies. The fact that Argentine capital is weaker than U.S., Italian or British capital consequently has no implications for the national rights of Argentina. If Fiat, U.S. banks or whoever exploit Argentine workers, the oppression involved is class oppression. The fact that the Italian or U.S. monopoly capital is imperialist capital (ie. stronger, & backed up by powerful imperialist states) is of course by no means irrelevant; but the fact that the capital involved is foreign is only of relevance to a nationalist. It is in this context that Third World nationalism is so pernicious in workers' movements in countries like Argentina, and it is because of this pervasive and diversionary nationalism that the junta was able to use the Malvinas invasion in the way it did. In other words, nationalism in Argentina can be used by Galtieri not because it is progressive, but because the mythologised, mystified conception of 'imperialism' as an external enemy is so easily available for nationalist anti-working class regimes in the Third World.

This is not to say that no Third World countries suffer national oppression, nor that some anti-capitalist demands cannot have a national dimension (sovereignty over oil-fields, for example - though nationalisation of oil-fields can also be an action of national bourgeoisies for their own benefit, and to be genuinely anti-imperialist have to be linked to the expropriation of local capital by the working class). What it is to say is that imperialist domination, as class oppression, can only be broken by a movement that is anti-capitalist in general.

To be clearer: it is not only - as all Trotskyists would agree - that 'only the working class' can effectively fight imperialism, but that (at least in countries where a relatively developed capitalist economy exists) no other struggle against imperialism is a struggle against imperialism at all.

It is in this sense that the majority are absolutely right to stress the unprogressive character of Argentine nationalism, and the minority absolutely wrong to believe that 'progressive' Argentine nationalism can dig the junta's own grave. Nationalism is always an ideology to serve the ruling class, even if in certain situations national struggle can be progressive (Vietnam, Cuba, Palestine, etc.). The whole conception that what is involved in Argentina is a national liberation struggle, even if the war was to lead to the downfall of this particular junta, would serve to strengthen the ideological domination of Argentine capital over the working class. Consequently, it is a central task of Argentine socialists, as in most Third World countries today where 'anti-imperialist' demagogy is so effective in maintaining the role of capital, to argue against nationalism; especially 'national' claims over hunks of rock 400 miles away, and especially where the effect of 'national sovereignty' over the Malvinas is/ would be to impose the rule of the junta on the islanders (suppose Britain hadn't retaliated?).

National oppression is involved in situations in which a nation (however defined) suffers direct political control from another, (whether imperialist or not) or armed occupation, or a suppression of national culture (language, traditions) by force. Arguably, foreign control over national resources might qualify - but we should be clear that to recapture control over, eg. an oil-field, only makes sense as part of a socialist revolution. Under certain circumstances, particular governments in the Third World do take action against imperialist interests (the most obvious example that comes to mind is Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956) in which case a partial anti-imperialist action is involved, but even here our support is surely extremely qualified, and a genuine anti-imperialist content to such action still depends upon independent working class action.

But to follow this analogy through, had the Argentine junta (for some reason difficult to imagine) taken a partial anti-imperialist measure (eg. nationalised Fiat or U.S. banks) - in which case there would have been a rational basis for working class support (as part of a strategy to follow up the action, which of necessity would involve expropriating Argentine capital) - and had imperialism responded to this action, the argument about 'a war against imperialism' would make sense. As I say, this scenario is difficult to imagine. The circumstances under which Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal do not readily repeat themselves: but clearly in such an event what would be involved is a) a response by imperialism to an action that actually does affect their short-term interests, & around which anti-imperialist working class mobilisation can be organised; b) direct military intervention threatening the national sovereignty of the country and attempting to reverse the action.

It is clear that the supposed national liberation struggle over the Malvinas is nothing like any of that. It is clear that the united imperialist response in support of Britain is not due to any action that can be regarded as anti-imperialist. What is at stake is on the one hand Britain's prestige (and also the Thatcher govt.) and on the other, a U.S. administration forced to back its major world ally against its major Latin American ally. National liberation versus imperialism doesn't enter into it. Nor, indeed, could it.

Does it follow from this that Britain & Argentina are 'equal', or that Argentina is not dominated by imperialism? In my opinion, as I have outlined, imperialist capital clearly does operate in Argentina, as capital, and Argentine workers therefore suffer class oppression from imperialism. The significance of this, to conclude, (ie. the

significance of imperialism's role in Argentina,) is not to render Argentine nationalism progressive, but to guarantee that any anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist action by the Argentine working class will directly bring it up against the imperialist states.

The bulk of this argument clearly is intended to support the position of the majority. However, it seems to me that there are a number of questions that need to be answered before the rank & file of the organisation can correctly assess the two positions.

QUESTIONS TO THE MAJORITY

- 1/ Is the general strategic argument contained at the end of the minority document incompatible with a defeatist position? It seems to me to correspond with the Trotskyist position in World War II - ie. it is essentially a defeatist position modified to take account of the nature of 'the enemy'.
- 2/ More fundamentally, what is your understanding of imperialism in Argentina? Do you think that imperialism dominates Argentina at all - in the sense that I have outlined (ie. drawing a distinction between imperialist domination and national oppression)? A recent book (Bill Warren, "Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism") argued that since Third World economies such as Argentina's are 'developing', imperialism is ceasing to exist. Is it the case that you equate Argentina's level of capitalist development automatically with the disappearance of imperialist domination in any sense?
- 3/ If this is the case, this clearly has deep implications for our politics as a whole. Unlike the minority who have a clearly expressed (and wrong) conception of imperialism, the majority have no theoretical position at all. If the answer to 2/ is 'yes', shouldn't we be having a major discussion on this question?
- 4/ Is it the case that you believe that a British victory is actually to the benefit of the Argentine workers?
- 5/ Is the dropping of the demand for Argentine withdrawal in the paper a deliberate move, on the grounds that this demand is one for the Argentine working class?

QUESTIONS TO THE MINORITY

- 1/ Is the general line at the end of the minority document (organising within the army, etc.) incompatible with a defeatist position? It seems to me that in conditions of conscription etc. 'defeatism' cannot mean much else than fighting for workers' organisation in the army, against Galtieri etc.. Isn't this the essence of turning the war into a civil war?
- 2/ In the context of this war, given the minority's rejection of the call for Argentine withdrawal (even as a principle), presumably the minority believe that this war is worth dying for. Do they therefore reject the idea that Argentine socialists should raise the whole question of whether or not Argentine possession of the Malvinas is genuinely an anti-imperialist issue and therefore worth the lives of Argentine workers.
- 3/ Why does defeatism in Argentina necessarily imply that a victory for British imperialism is good from the point of view of Argentine workers (any more than we at present equate British defeat with Argentine victory?)

CONCLUSION

There is a great danger that the question of imperialism can be used as a factional football in this debate. Faced on the one hand with a conception of imperialism that is so mystified as to believe that in any sense Galtieri's war is anti-imperialist, it is tempting to simply go along with the majority. But the ambiguities need to be ironed out. We need to know exactly what defeatism entails in Argentina; whether it involves anything radically different from the minority position. And in my opinion - probably when all this is over - the WSL needs to undertake some theoretical work on imperialism (which no Trotskyist has ever done - except Mandel, but his attempt is lament-

able) and happily guarantee that this kind of confusion is not repeated. Consequently I propose the establishment of some kind of 'commission' to provide a document on contemporary imperialism sometime in the near future.

Ellis; Manchester.

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PERMANENT REVOLUTION: NOTES AS BACKGROUND TO AMENDMENTS TO TILC
DRAFT ON CENTRAL AMERICA

The general perspective for the revolution in the semi colonial countries is analysed in the TP:

" The struggle for the most elementary achievements of national independence and bourgeois democracy is combined with the socialist struggle against world imperialism ...

" As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic programme. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic programme, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise ... Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution".

The primary task for Marxists is to organise the working class - both urban or rural - into a separate class party. That class party, with a revolutionary programme, must then aim to forge an alliance between the working class and petty bourgeois forces. But it must be an alliance against the national bourgeoisie, and an alliance not with all petty bourgeois forces in general.

" The alliance proposed by the proletariat - not to the 'middle classes' in general but to the exploited layers of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, against all exploiters, including those of the 'middle classes' - can be based not on compulsion but only on free consent, which should be consolidated in a special 'contract'. This 'contract' is the programme of transitional demands voluntarily accepted by both sides". (TP)

The same point about the need to appeal, not to the middle classes in general, but to their revolutionary elements, was made by the Communist International in its 1920 discussions on the National and Colonial Question.

As Lenin explained: " Very often - even in most cases, perhaps - while the bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries does support the national movement, it is at the same time in accord with the imperialist bourgeoisie, that is, together with the latter it fights against all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes. This was irrefutably demonstrated in the commission, and we decided that the only correct thing was to take this distinction into account and in nearly all cases substitute the term 'national-revolutionary' for 'bourgeois-democratic'... we, as Communists, should and will support bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary..."

Also: "Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realised in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie". (Trotsky, The Permanent Revolution).

The necessity for a struggle against the national bourgeoisie is based on that bourgeoisie's fierce antagonism to the labouring masses, and its reluctance to fight imperialism consistently, not on the idea that the national bourgeoisie cannot oppose imperialism at all. Thus in 1928 Trotsky rejected the Stalinists' contention that the Chinese bourgeoisie had 'definitely gone over to the counter-revolutionary camp'.

"There will still be not a few leftward zigzags in the policy of the Chinese bourgeoisie. There will be no lack of temptations in the future for the amateurs of the 'national united front'. To tell the Chinese communists today that their alliance with the bourgeoisie from 1924 to the end of 1927 was correct but that it is worthless now because the bourgeoisie has definitely gone over to the counter-revolutionary camp, is to disarm the Chinese communists..." (Third International After Lenin)

In relation to such leftward zigzags, the proletarian policy must be as indicated previously by us: "For specific and limited tasks under certain conditions the proletarian and poor peasantry can - without making any concession in their own demands - wage a struggle jointly with sections of the 'national' bourgeoisie against the imperialist enemy in the 'national' front".

"But it is wrong to seek to extend such temporary alliances to the level of a long-term political bloc, in which the independent programme and struggles of the working class and poor peasants are subordinated to the political demands of the 'democratic' bourgeoisie in the name of an 'anti-imperialist front'".

Latin America is to be located within this general strategy for the semi-colonial countries. It has its peculiarities, but these - particularly the fact that the countries of Latin America have a relatively high level of capitalist development, and bourgeoisies with a much longer record of independent rule, than other semi-colonial countries, together with the fact of the tremendous combativity of the masses in Latin America - rather strengthen than diminish the need for independence of proletarian politics.

Trotsky directly discussed strategy for Latin America in the following terms:

"Latin American society, like every society - developed or backward - is composed of three classes: the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and the proletariat....

"During the struggle for the democratic tasks, we oppose the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The independence of the proletariat even at the beginning of this movement is absolutely necessary, and we especially oppose the proletariat to the bourgeoisie in the agrarian question, for that class will rule in Mexico as in every Latin American country which has the peasants...

"In every case where it is a direct fight (by the national bourgeoisie) against the foreign imperialists or their reactionary fascist agents, we give support, preserving the full political independence of our organisation, of our programme, of our party and the full freedom of our criticism. The Kuomintang in China, the PRM in Mexico and the APRA in Peru are very similar organisations. It is the People's Front in the form of a party.

"Of course the People's Front in Latin America does not have so reactionary a character as in France or in Spain. It is two-sided. It can have a reactionary attitude insofar as it is directed against the workers; it can have an aggressive attitude insofar as it is directed against imperialism.

"But in our appreciation of the People's Front in Latin America in the form of a national political party, we make a distinction from France and from Spain. But this historical difference of appreciation and difference of attitude can be permitted only under the condition that our organisation doesn't participate in the APRA, Kuomintang, or PRM, that it preserves absolute freedom of action and criticism." ('Latin American Problems', November 1938).

(That is - even if the Popular Front objectively has a somewhat different role in Latin America, the need for proletarian independence from it remains. Trotsky's argument would also apply to Popular Fronts in the form of 'anti-imperialist front' as well as Popular Fronts in the form of parties.)

Trotsky further remarked: "Of course, we cannot enter such a party (as APRA); but we can create a nucleus in it in order to win the workers and separate them from the bourgeoisie. But under no circumstances can we repeat the Stalinist idiocy with the Kuomintang in China".

In relation to the KMT in China also, Trotsky refers elsewhere to the possibility of communists, when they are only a small nucleus, doing fraction work in such a movement. But he always draws a strict distinction, vital from the point of view of Marxism, between such tactics possibly forced on a very small Marxist nucleus, and the necessity for the Marxists, to the extent that they are able to appear as a political force, to appear as politically independent.

Since World War 2, in conditions of the weakening of imperialism, the strengthening of Stalinism, the weakness of revolutionary Marxism, and the tremendous new revolt of the masses of the 'Third World', revolutionary petty bourgeois nationalists in several countries (Algeria, Mozambique and Angola are examples) have broken substantially with the bourgeoisie, undertaken major struggles against imperialism, won serious victories - and consolidated state capitalist regimes, sometimes clashing heavily with the working class, and in all cases continuing its oppression and exploitation.

In China, Vietnam (and Yugoslavia) the petty bourgeois nationalists concerned were the Stalinist parties - who went further, and established deformed workers' states, but equally were bitterly counter-revolutionary against the working class.

The Chinese leaders rationalised their strategy thus: "unite the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, form a domestic united front under the leadership of the working class, and advance from this to the establishment of a state which is a people's democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the working class..." (Mao). "Uninterrupted revolution", they argued, meant that "The national-democratic revolution is the necessary preparation for the socialist revolution, and the socialist revolution is the inevitable sequel to the national-democratic revolution. There is no Great Wall between the two revolutionary stages. But the socialist revolution is only possible after the completion of the national-democratic revolution" (Lin Piao). And the alliance with the "national bourgeoisie" should and could be maintained right through the "socialist revolution".

This theory is an ideological encoding of the facts of the Chinese Stalinist party's ability to dominate its few bourgeois allies and to manipulate alliances and movements with bourgeois-democratic formal programmes according to the CCP's own politics. But this ability was certainly

not "working class leadership" or "proletarian hegemony"; it led not to socialist revolution but to a foreshortened distortion of it and to the establishment of a bureaucratic state machine stamping the working class under foot. And, being based on the use of military-bureaucratic strength (partly derived from the CCP's relation with the Kremlin) to manipulate the masses, it is not a possibility open to proletarian socialists.

Versions of the Maoist strategy have been widely influential, and not only among Maoists. Very often they have just led to the subordination of left-wing organisations to vain searches for a proper national bourgeoisie to ally with. Under no circumstances have they served socialism.

The Cuban experience presents important difference. The Castroite petty bourgeois radicals - not Stalinists - genuinely moved to the left in a serious way during the revolution, and consolidated a deformed workers' state (i.e. one without accountable, democratic forms of workers' power, but rather with a sort of plebiscitary populism) while basing themselves seriously on the working class and not directly opposing it. Moreover, they seriously fought for the international extension of the revolution, and that not on the basis of the 'bloc of classes' or 'stages' theories put forward by all other tendencies bar Trotskyism.

As Guevara pointed out:

"In many countries of America there are objective conflicts between the national bourgeoisies struggling to develop and ... imperialism... In spite of these conflicts the national bourgeoisies are not capable, in general, of sustaining a consequential struggle against imperialism. They fear the popular revolution more than sufferings under the oppressive and despotic domination of imperialism..." ('Cuba, exception or vanguard').

And again:

"The autochthonous bourgeoisie have lost all their capacity to oppose imperialism - if they ever had it - and they have become the last card in the pack. There are no alternatives: either a socialist revolution or a make-believe revolution" (Message to the Tricontinental).

But the Castroite regime hardened bureaucratically and came more under the control of the Kremlin. And the Castroite movement in Latin America ran into the sands, as a result of its populist confusion between working class and peasantry and above all its failure to deal politically with Stalinism. Despite the collapse of Maoism as such, versions of the Maoist theory (boosted by the Vietnam experience) have regained a grip on much of the Left, alongside the more rigidly stage-ist Kremlin theory.

Thus none of these revolutions, not even the Cuban, can be accepted by Trotskyists as representing a 'model' of a 'first stage' to which we should subordinate ourselves. In any case, the 'models' now actually adopted from all these revolutions are class-bloc, revolution-by-stages strategies - falsifying the actual experience. Such a strategy was followed by the Sandinistas, who now provide a model to other petty bourgeois revolutionaries.

'Proletarian hegemony in a people's front' is the general formula. It can be given more or less left wing versions according to the definition of 'proletarian hegemony'. But it must always subordinate the working class to bourgeois (or aspirant-bourgeois) nationalism or to the machinations of international Kremlin-Stalinism, the only force which sometimes has sufficient apparatus strength to participate in such fronts and simply overpower

bourgeois forces, for neither of these alien forces can be gradually, peacefully subordinated to the working class.

The wish to learn from the Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions is legitimate, indeed necessary. A great deal of work remains to be done by Trotskyists on this score. But for sure the line of copying the ideological rationalisations given by the leaders of those revolutions while perhaps trying to give them a more left wing or Marxist gloss, will not yield positive results. And the fundamentals of Marxism still give guidance.

The position of Marxists towards such revolutions led by petty bourgeois nationalists must be (in broad outline and with the relevant alterations according to circumstances) that proposed by Marx in 1850. (To 'bourgeois-democrat', we could add 'or Stalinist').

"At the moment, while the democratic petty bourgeois are everywhere oppressed, they preach to the proletariat general unity and reconciliation; they extend the hand of friendship, and seek to found a great opposition party which will embrace all shades of democratic opinion; that is they seek to ensnare the workers in a party organisation in which general social-democratic phrases prevail, while their particular interests are kept hidden behind, and in which, for the sake of preserving the peace, the specific demands of the proletariat may not be presented. Such a unity would be to their advantage alone and to the complete disadvantage of the proletariat....

"Instead of lowering themselves to the level of an applauding chorus the workers, and above all the League, must work for the creation of an independent organisation of the workers' party, both secret and open alongside the official democrats, and the League must aim to make every one of its communes a centre and nucleus of workers' associations in which the position and interests of the proletariat can be discussed free from bourgeois influence...

"During and after the struggle the workers must at every opportunity put forward their own demands against those of the bourgeois democrats... They must check in every way and as far as it is possible the victory euphoria and enthusiasm for the new situation which follow every successful street battle, with a cool and cold-blooded analysis of the situation and with undisguised mistrust of the new government.

"Alongside the new official governments they must simultaneously establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, either in the form of local executive committees and councils or through workers' clubs and committees, so that from the very moment of victory the workers' suspicion must be directed no longer against the defeated reactionary party but against their former ally, against the party which intends to exploit the common victory for itself....

" Their battle-cry must be: The Permanent Revolution". (March Address).

KINNELL. December 1981.

LETTER ON THE MALVINAS WAR

Dear Comrades,

Your articles and editorials on the Malvinas crisis are a disappointment for a paper which claims to have some connection with internationalism. To reply to some of your more contradictory, muddled positions, let me direct your attention to the following points which, in my view, are necessary to counter the gross inversion of Marxism which you have espoused in dealing with the Malvinas.

1. You say that the British have been trying to get rid of the Malvinas for years and are fighting merely to save face. This step towards characterising Britain as a reluctant imperialist - as is again suggested with regard to Ireland - is a ludicrous and clumsy attempt to avoid the real character of the war. The psychology of "the imperialists has never been our criteria. As Trotsky states in "In Defence of Marxism": "The entire foreign policy of finance capital is imperialist regardless of whether it be occupied at a given moment in carrying out an annexation or in 'defending' Finland against annexation" (page 130, Pathfinder edn.). To claim that Britain has been trying to get rid of the Malvinas glosses over the fact that Britain has been trying to achieve a semi-colonial deal with Argentina over the Malvinas, which would give sovereignty to Argentina, but guarantee Britain's economic interests such as: oil prospecting; minerals, territorial & strategic rights in the Malvinas and Antarctica. It is precisely because Argentina resisted such rights that Britain refused to grant sovereignty. In short, Britain was seeking a Zimbabwe-type deal which left its essential interests intact. The war is not to save face, but because Thatcher knows that if Argentina succeeds in this war, it will spur on other oppressed nations to retake their stolen territories all over the world. It would be the thin end of the wedge. That is why Thatcher is making such an issue out of it. It is the fact that Argentina took the islands by force that makes this a crucial issue for Thatcher and the imperialists. A peacefully negotiated, Zimbabwe-type semi-colonial deal would not have been a problem because it would not have acted to spur on the anti-imperialist struggle world-wide. Thatcher recognises, by her actions, that the invasion is, objectively, a threat to imperialism.

2. You say in the same article that Marxists must fight in the camp of the working class and... not in the camp of either Thatcher or Galtieri. This is totally mistaken. We must condemn Galtieri not for fighting the war, but for not conducting it ruthlessly enough, for being an inadequate leadership. We must give 100% support to the war and encourage Trotskyists in Argentina to play a leading role in the war, the better to expose the sham nature of the Junta's anti-imperialism. This implies, of course, the maintenance of political independence. You continue: "Galtieri's invasion did not liberate anyone from colonialism and imperialism". This is a statement that very conveniently forgets to place the present crisis in its historical and social context. Instead, it rips the present crisis from its location in (literally) time and space, so that we see it purely from the here & now - a blinkered view which suits the Thatcher government very nicely. The whole of the bloody cess-pool of imperialist history is thus contemptuously dismissed with a wave of the hand. There are quite a few embarrassing little 'details' from the past which the imperialists would like to forget. Of course it is very difficult to 'liberate' an Argentine 'population' on the Malvinas, especially when the islands were unceremoniously grabbed by the British invasion in 1833! To claim that Galtieri's invasion did not liberate anyone from colonialism, and not mention these historical facts is pure dishonesty - a dishonesty which suits the rationale of Thatcher.

The facts that you conveniently omit are that the Malvinas were "liberated from colonialism" in the early 19th century when the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata declared independence from

Spain. It was only decades later in 1833 that Britain suddenly decided to invade them. The claim on the islands by Argentina has remained consistently since that time. Galtieri was only able to gain popularity by the invasion because the Argentines do actually regard the Malvinas as part of Argentina. This nationalism has a progressive democratic content, precisely because of this history. Do we accept the right of a colonial power to occupy territory on the other side of the globe, install its own population after having robbed it from the democratic national movement of the creoles, and then declare the settlers' rights of self-determination? (The Buenos Aires creoles had claimed sovereignty over the Malvinas when they declared independence from Spain in 1816, it should be remembered).

It is necessary to stress that the Falkland Islanders are not demanding self-determination; they are demanding to remain part of the colonial power - Britain. In my view they are themselves an enclave of the colonial power, despite being a tiny population. This does not mean that they are in any way responsible for the historical predicament in which they find themselves; nor does it mean that they are not entitled to stay on the islands. But, whether they realise it or not, by opposing Argentina's sovereignty, by wishing to remain linked to the colonial power, they are implicitly upholding and supporting imperialist interests in the area: oil, mineral, territorial & strategic interests.

To pretend that the Falklanders or the Brits could be unaware of these conflicting interests, to pretend that the issue of sovereignty and control of the Falklands/Malvinas can be divorced from these economic (and possibly strategic) interests, is to bury one's head in the sand. The choice for the Falklanders is simple: either stay, recognise Argentinian sovereignty and fight the regime with the Argentine working class, or leave and demand compensation from the British government, who created the problem. (In my view, the revolutionary left in Britain should take up this demand). In no way can the present generation of Falklanders be held responsible for the current crisis; but neither have they the right to veto what is a matter of self-determination for Argentina as a whole.

3. To counterpose the correct demand for the expropriation of all imperialist holdings in Argentina to the limited action over the Malvinas is ridiculous. Does that mean that we are opposed to democracy in the Labour Party as fought for by the careerist, reformist Benn, because he does not advocate the overthrow of capitalism? To concentrate on the reactionary motives of Galtieri in launching the invasion as a justification for not supporting the legitimate territorial claims of Argentina, is to confuse the issue of imperialist oppression. The IWL letter correctly cites the case of Brazil/Britain in the 30s, as being comparable to the present conflict. (Alan Brookes's claim that somehow Varga's regime wasn't so 'nasty' as Galtieri's, is childish). The whole of the editorial line in S.O. is infected by a non-Marxist 'moral' abhorrence of the repressive Argentine regime. This understandable revulsion would seem to have blinded the editors to a clinical assessment of the relations between the colonial powers and the 'Third World'; the relations between countries has become obscured by a preoccupation with the internal regimes (Thatcher's & Galtieri's).

4. You claim that the analogy with Ireland or Palestine is not valid, but do not justify your claim, saying merely that you would not wish the Zionists or Protestants "the same fate that the Falklanders are likely to face under Galtieri's boot". As Trotsky points out: "The policy of defeatism is not a punishment of a given government for this or that crime it has committed but a conclusion from the class relationships" (I.D.M. p. 176). Your attitude again reveals the preoccupation with moral revulsion against the political form - dictatorship is evil; 'democracy' is good.

Having blinded the reader with an issue which is emotive, but entirely separate from the question, the article then fails to address itself to the central question raised by the IWL letter - do the Falklanders have the right of veto over the question of sovereignty? Or do we not accept that it is the right of self-determination of Argentina as a whole which should prevail?

5. You say that the Falklanders have neither "displaced anyone, nor oppress any community". Firstly, the British robbed the islands from the Buenos Aires creoles in 1833; secondly, to the extent that they deny Argentine sovereignty, the islanders are accomplices of the oppressor colonial power which has claims on Argentine oil, and mineral interests in the part of the Antarctic adjacent to Argentina, and who claim the territory of the Falkland Islands robbed from the creoles in 1833.

You further state that it is "not an issue of Argentine national unity", again as a bald, arrogant assertion with no attempt to justify it. This is a scandalous attitude in an article replying to a letter from Argentine comrades over a sensitive issue. In fact the whole of the reply is rotten with arrogance and a cavalier off-handedness - an attitude that must have angered any Argentine or Latin American reading it. The content is bad enough, but the pompous way in which it was written is a disgrace, particularly in the present crisis.

6. Your statements about the invasion being "a reactionary war" fly in the face of the anti-imperialist character of the war, the completion of the 19th century war of liberation against colonialism. Again as Trotsky points out, "The Marxist line of conduct in war is not based on abstract moral or sentimental considerations but on the social appraisal of a regime in its reciprocal relations with other regimes" (IDM p.176). The relationship of Argentina is one of dependency. That should be our starting point.

7. Your statement that it is a war between "two right-wing governments both striving for self-assertion and prestige" is a non-materialist statement which glosses over the actual material interests outlined above. Capitalists do not fight over 'face'.

8. You also say that the working class cannot support "either Galtieri's takeover or Thatcher's equally reactionary response". This is a concession to pacifism, marxists must give critical support to the Argentine invasion. (If the Dublin government invaded the 6 Counties would we remain neutral? - Certainly not, we would support the move).

9. You say "Galtieri's invasion had nothing to do with any supposed struggle against imperialism. On the contrary - his record shows him to be a faithful junior partner of imperialism..." This is again missing the point about imperialism. As was pointed out in 'The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle' and once again in the 'Draft Platform' (July 1981), "... For specific and limited tasks under certain conditions the proletariat and poor peasants can - without making any concessions in their own demands - wage a struggle jointly with sections of the 'national' bourgeoisie against the imperialist enemy". (Even a semi-Bonapartist military dictatorship is still only a form of the national bourgeoisie). A junior partner of imperialism Galtieri may well have been, but he is hardly in tandem with British imperialism on this "specific and limited task", is he?

10. You further state that: "We must not hesitate to speak out against the junta because of some nebulous fear that we thereby 'line up with the Tories and imperialism'." This can only be the

height of irresponsibility in the present jingoistic climate in Britain.

It is a view which has nothing whatever to do with the tasks of revolutionaries in an oppressor colonial power. It is an invitation to exacerbate the problem of jingoism, not challenge it. It is a catalogue of slanders against the Argentine national struggle. Our task is not to echo the hypocritical cant of the Thatcher government by whining about 'fascist dictatorships', but to emphasise again and again the legitimacy of the Argentine case.

Anything short of this is at best opportunist fudging of the issue, and at worst "lining up with the Tories and imperialism". This is not a nebulous fear, it is a very real actuality that your line reinforces the ideology of Thatcher. It also does little to educate or challenge the blinkered pacifism of the Labour left, which is probably even more to the point.

It is about time that you stopped tailinnding the pacifists and led these layers on a principled basis of defeat for Britain and victory for Argentina. To call for revolutionary defeatism in Britain, as you do, is one thing, but if this is not coupled with the demand for 'Victory to Argentina', then there is an implicit failure to meet, head on, the massive chauvinism within the working class generally, or the pacifism of the CND/Labour left in particular. The neutral 'plague on both houses' is a concession to this climate.

CHRIS E.