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The TILC Resolution and the WSL

Minority

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INTRODUCTION

This document was first drafted early in June. Its circulation has been held up because of a technical bottleneck at the centre. It is a measure of the speed at which things have developed that the interpretation of the TILC resolution has already more or less ceased to be central to the dispute in the WSL.

The minority claimed continuity with the TILC conference resolution on the basis of one sentence (and only part of that sentence). That was their starting point. What will their finishing point be, I now increasingly wonder.

The second tendency document, IB7, has moved very far from the minority interpretation of the TILC resolution and far even from the politics of the tendency's first document.

Examination of the TILC document, and of the minority's interpretation of it, has therefore now become a way for comrades to put the present stage of the discussion in the WSL in perspective. By examining the roots of the dispute, and where the minority have come from politically, comrades will find it impossible to avoid asking themselves what is now the burning question for the WSL; where is the minority headed with its current politics - with its more and more reckless substitution of "camp", block, "anti-imperialist" (meaning the sovereign Argentine state and its bourgeois rulers), "international balance of forces" concerns, for class politics and Trotskyism.

I remind comrades that the minority started out at the EC on May 9 claiming to base themselves entirely on the TILC resolution. Then and since, they have made it their battlecry that the majority reneged on that resolution (and/or practised duplicity at the TILC conference by voting for it).

Lenin wrote, dealing with the disputes about what had happened at the 1903 conference of the RSDLP (in which the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions first emerged) that comrades should study the records. "Anyone", he wrote, "who takes someone else's word for it in politics is a hopeless idiot" ('One Step Forward, Two Steps Back'). Study the record, comrades. Find out who is telling the truth.

Look at the massive political distance the minority have travelled from the positions they previously held in common with the majority. Compare the position of the TILC conference with the 'Third Worldism' of IB7, which brackets the Argentine bourgeoisie and its state in the same "class camp" as the proletariat:

"We have to determine our position according to the basic class camps, not on conjunctural events" ... "the class camp into which Argentina fits in a war against imperialism..." (p.4)

Note that IB 7 declares:

"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... 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 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... This is not in any way to suggest that independent workers' organisations are not one of the most important factors in any struggle". (p.14) (emphasis added)

Contrast this with the Trotskyist insistence on independent workers' organisation as the irreplaceable foundation-stone of our politics - not just an "important factor". Contrast it with the TILC resolution on Central America of last December, rejecting the

perspective of 'proletarian hegemony in an anti-imperialist united front' for Central America, and insisting instead on independent proletarian politics. Contrast it with the politics of one of the foundation struggles of the Trotskyist movement - the struggle against the Stalin-Bukharin line that the "mass reformist anti-imperialist movement" of the Kuomintang in China was as good as any framework for workers' struggle.

IB7 complains:

"All he (Carolan) can see is the junta, and its victory, and its defeat. The masses are a mere shadow or mirror image..." (p.14)

Compare Trotsky:

"Bukharin asks, 'And what about the Kuomintang masses, are they mere cattle?' Of course they are cattle. The masses of any bourgeois party are always cattle, although in different degrees. But for us, the masses are not cattle, are they? No, that is precisely why we are forbidden to drive them into the arms of the bourgeoisie, camouflaging the latter under the label of a workers' and peasants' party" (Trotsky on China p.331). Or under the label of a "mass reformist anti-imperialist movement"?

And remember that the "mass anti-imperialist movement" referred to in IB7 is not the Kuomintang of the '20s, nor the FMLN-FDR, but the Peronist-dominated mass mobilisation behind Galtieri's war! Trotskyism rejects the notion that proletarian independent organisation is dispensable in "more backward" countries. But Argentina is a country which had an independent workers' party of some substance as long ago as 1894!

Read further in IB7 and see where the notion of basing ourselves on something other than the working class struggle is made explicit:

"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" (p.7).

Exactly what anti-imperialist struggle is referred to is made clear in the following paragraph: "The last period has seen several successes for the anti-imperialist struggle. Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Iran, Nicaragua..."

To side with the Sandinistas against Somoza, or even Khomeini against the Shah, is one thing. To say that our position must be determined by the (presumed) effect of events on such struggles, "whatever the implications... for the... proletariat", is plain popular-frontism on an international level. Yet that is what IB 7 explicitly argues.

"The international class enemy" is "the imperialists", IB7 states on p.6. And on p.8:

"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".

This is "a genuine struggle in which the real balance of forces between imperialism and the anti-imperialist masses is genuinely being tested" (p.9).

If the document, beneath all the high-flown talk of "idealism" and "contradictions", means anything, it means here that the imperialist bourgeoisies (as opposed to bourgeoisie like Argentina's) are the 'main enemy', and in a 'tight' situation the need to defeat this 'main enemy' is paramount, 'whatever the implications for the proletariat'. Such politics, of course, have many precedents. But

not in Trotskyism!

Read the assessment in IB 7 of the invasion and the war in "defence of the invasion".

"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" (p.10).

Compare the firm, clear condemnation of the invasion in the TILC resolution, and even the statement in the minority's May 9 resolution that they maintained the same assessment of the invasion.

Observe the fact that IB7, despite a great deal of declamation about imperialism, nowhere replies to the arguments I presented in IB6 on the question. I argued that in a country like Argentina, which has long had political independence - i.e. has had the maximum independence economically possible in the modern world - the only meaningful anti-imperialism is the socialist working-class struggle. IB7 clearly dissents but nowhere argues. (In return, however, it takes three full pages to argue against the view, which nobody has advanced, that the character of the Argentine regime should be decisive for our line). Does this mean that the authors of IB 7 believe that the 'national bourgeoisie' can be meaningfully counterposed as a progressive force against imperialism? From the whole of their arguments - which have more in common with Maoism than with Trotskyism - we can only conclude: yes, they do.

If comrades find it a bit tedious now to examine from all sides one sentence of the TILC resolution, then they should remember that it was that sentence and that sentence alone that the comrades made their credo. From it has sprouted their current politics.

It is vitally important to get the record straight. At the core of our concept of the revolutionary party is the belief that the cardinal task of the party is the ideological struggle against the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and the Stalinist bureaucracy, for a working-class outlook. This conditions, shapes, and controls everything else that the party does, from participating in strikes through to organising an armed insurrection.

It is essential to Marxist politics that we render precise and honest accounts to ourselves. Our method in politics is to map out the terrain theoretically, to be guided by our basic class political programme and goals. We try to think things through rigorously. We derive our tactical conclusions from our principled assessments, and when we modify our conclusions in the light of practical experience, we relate back directly to our principled considerations, checking ourselves, keeping things in perspective. We practise strict political accounting. Otherwise we waver and flounder and get shifted from our class and Marxist moorings by the tides of events. We fail to fulfill the irreplaceable, fundamental task of a revolutionary party - to maintain and explain a clear class line even in the most complicated or adverse circumstances. We fail to be true to our class politics, and get taken in tow by alien class forces.

On the Falklands war we made an assessment and took a position at the TILC conference. It was endorsed at the April 25 NC with

no-one voting against. Now the minority, claiming to base themselves on the TILC resolution which they are 'developing', have jettisoned that resolution's politics, substituting for it cloudy notions and dubious assessments of "the international balance of forces". By not admitting that they have broken completely with the letter, spirit and method of the TILC resolution, the comrades have completely muddled the political water.

The minority comrades' response now to discussion of their political zig-zags is that what matters is whether they are right or not now. Comrades, with your record so far on the Falklands issue, it would be a sheer accident and a surprising one, if what you are saying now should prove to be correct!

To members who have supported the minority we say: so you believe that we should have backed Argentina? Then we have an important disagreement. But what do you think of the anti-Trotskyist, 'Third Worldist', explicitly non-proletarian politics that the tendency have now brought in to buttress that position against the arguments of the majority?

The comments in this introduction are not, of course, a full reply to IB 7. The document is concerned with the TILC resolution and its relation to the positions argued in the first tendency document. Because of its length, it seems useful to give an outline of its contents and arguments here.

PART 1 (pages 1 to 11)

examines the sentence - the one sentence - from the TILC resolution on which the minority originally claimed to base themselves. By doing this from all sides I hope to demonstrate that there is no basis to the minority claims about this sentence; and no basis for the charge that the majority reneged on a commitment to adopt the minority's politics.

This section includes an account of the discussion at the TILC conference out of which the famous sentence came.

PART 2: page 12: Read the rest of the resolution!

The rest of the resolution clinches the argument. It shows that we did anticipate war, and we called for Argentine withdrawal and the right of the islanders to decide their own future in that context.

PART 3

discusses the politics of the resolution as a whole and the minority's abandonment of them.

Page 13: Did we see Argentina as qualitatively different from Britain?

The minority argue (tendency document p.5) that either the war between Britain and Argentina was a classic inter-imperialist war, or it was a war of an oppressed nation against an oppressor.

This document argues that the Falklands war was neither, and was assessed by the TILC resolution as neither. The minority's attempt to cram the war into one or another of two textbook categories, according to crude textbook labels, excludes all concrete analysis - including the concrete analysis of the TILC resolution.

Page 15: Argentina's national rights

"National rights are involved", the tendency document argued,

" - the right 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".

This document argues that the notion of national rights held here by the minority is non-Marxist - and arises from the drive to jam the Falklands war into the category "national liberation war" in defiance of all concrete assessment.

Page 16: Does the minority really want to preserve the state apparatus of Argentina?

The minority insists, of course, that "To stand for the defence of Argentina in the war does not imply, of course, support for the blood-drenched military junta" (tendency doc. p.2). Yet their other attempt to argue that the war was about Argentine national rights is that it could have involved "the destruction of most of the Argentine navy and air force and much of its army..." (p.6).

So the smashing up of the Argentine military machine would be a decisively bad result from the war? So we should have sided with Argentina to try to avoid that danger? This document argues that on the contrary the damage to the Argentine military machine was a positive aspect of the war's outcome.

Page 18: the minority have abandoned the TILC commitment to self-determination for the Falklanders.

The tendency document (p.7) says: "if the settlers were a distinct and viable community and were asking for self-determination, we would support them... But they are not asking for self-determination. They are militantly pro-imperialist and determined to stay so... we cannot subordinate the world political situation to the Falkland settlers and give them an imperialist veto".

If such considerations were decisive in May, then they should have prevented us in April from including in the TILC document: "the Falkland inhabitants should have the right to decide their own future".

But from a Leninist - or democratic - point of view, the right of self-determination of a community cannot be conditional on them playing the sacrificial role the minority ascribe to them in their vision of a symbolic anti-imperialist drama.

Page 20: Is Lenin on the imperialist war irrelevant to the Falklands war?

This section examines the view that the war can be defined simply by reference to the descriptions "imperialist"/"non-imperialist". Such definition replaces concrete analysis, according to a Marxist method, with labels too abstract to yield any adequate picture of what the war was about.

Page 21: Our duplicity

The minority have been free with accusations of bad faith against the majority in our interpretation of the TILC resolution. This concluding section summarises the evidence to show that it is in fact the minority that has departed from the TILC resolution without adequate political accounting.

11/7/82.

THE "TILC RESOLUTION" AND THE WSL MINORITY

By T. Carolan

"The philistine does not realise that war is " 'the continuation of policy', and consequently links himself to the formula that: 'the enemy has attacked us', 'the enemy has invaded my country', without stopping to think what issues are at stake in the war, which classes are waging it, and with what political objectives... For the philistine the important thing is where the armies stand, who is winning at the moment. For the marxist the important thing is what issues are at stake in this war, during which first one, then the other army may be on top." (Emphasis as in original)
LENIN: Collected Works, Vol 23. p 33.

Perhaps the biggest propaganda success the Tendency has had so far is with its line on the so-called TILC Resolution. (It was actually a WSL resolution passed at the Easter Conference of TILC by the votes of the WSL and the Danes against the strong opposition of the rest of TILC who wanted us then to adopt the sort of position which the minority of the WSL NC has since adopted. Throughout the discussion at the Easter Conference we were already "isolated in TILC": even the Danes were on the other side and their last-minute vote on our side came politically unexpected - to me at least)

The Tendency have convinced even some supporters of the WSL position on the war - defeatism on both sides - that the TILC Res., or key sections of it, backs up the current politics of the minority. This is utterly ridiculous as anybody who takes the trouble to read the whole resolution (IB5) will see. The TILC resolution speaks exclusively for the present politics of the WSL on the war.

In fact the TILC Resolution is, in my opinion, inadequate, and in some ways it is seriously inadequate. It lacks a positive and straightforward exposition on the core of the British/Argentine dispute, the Falklands issue (though it is plainly in favour of self-determination for the Falklanders). It is a compromise document and the consequence of this is that in some of its formulations and balances it is ambiguous and even ambivalent. You will find in it a few phrases which might be interpreted as mutually contradictory.

But it is nevertheless perfectly plain and clear in its basic ideas, assessments and in its main political conclusions. The document was and remains a roughly adequate exposition of the correct marxist analysis and politics on the Falklands war. In its essentials it has not been superseded and rendered obsolete by the events of the war, though of course it has now been superseded as a concrete account of events.

And - despite what the opposition now say / ^{or rather} imply - it was a serious resolution written on the working assumption that war was imminent. It was not written, as the comrades now ^{in effect} say, tongue-in-cheek with ideas, attitudes and positions adopted lightmindedly in the belief that war would not happen - attitudes, policies and positions which had to be jettisoned when the war did happen.

(The comrades are forced to say and imply this because they must justify their own jettisoning of the resolution - except for a part of one sentence, which they misconstrue! - when the guns started going off.)

There is of course no getting away from the fact that whatever the correct reading of the TILC Resolution we have now in the WSL two radically different interpretations of it. It is unlikely that analysing a text will sort this out for us, or lead us to concrete answers. These will have to be worked out afresh.

Nevertheless it is important to discuss the text of the TILC Resolution to help comrades orient in the internal WSL discussion. The opposition have claimed to base themselves on that resolution. From the majority's point of view the resolution is the written proof that the opposition have had no stable politics on the British/Argentine conflict and have oscillated and zigzagged wildly under pressure of events.

Here I want only to examine and discuss the TILC Resolution and will touch on other points only in passing and to comment on material from the Tendency document which has a bearing on the interpretation of the TILC Resolution.

Part 1

THE FAMOUS SENTENCE

The minority seize on the loosely phrased subordinate clause of one sentence in the TILC Resolution and base their whole current politics on it! This is the sentence: "While recognising that the present conflict is restricted to the Falklands issue, in the event of a full-scale war between Britain and Argentina we would be unequivocally for the defence of Argentina"

They seize on the subordinate clause ("in the event of a full-scale war between Britain and Argentina we would be unequivocally for the defence of Argentina"), and ignore the major clause which gives the political definition of the war in precise terms: "While recognising that the present conflict is restricted to the Falklands issue..." Grammar and logic are on the side of the majority here. (Emphasis added).

It is quite plain in the sentence which is the main and which the subordinate clause whose meaning and interpretation are regulated qualified and focused by the main clause. "The present conflict is restricted to the Falklands": if, however, that changes, and it becomes "full-scale war", full-scale meaning - as the sub clause it can have no other meaning - no longer "restricted to the Falklands issue", but a full-scale conflict which goes beyond that issue and in which the question of Argentine national rights and liberties are posed, then we will be "unequivocally for the defence of Argentina". That's the only interpretation the sentence the comrades voted for (and Cde J.L. wrote) will bear.

"The expression "full-scale war" is, unfortunately, loose, itself to the minority's misinterpretation that the scale of the war in the sense of extent of the military operations is what is being talked about. Given what the main clause of the sentence says, that, logically and grammatically, can't be the meaning. It could have that meaning only if the sub-clause is taken in isolation from the rest of the sentence - and then

only if you divorce it from the political framework of the main clause, and from the politics of the rest of the resolution

WHAT IS FULL-SCALE WAR?

The definition of "full-scale war" is clearly important. What is "Full-scale war?" The only interpretation that the text will bear is that it is a war in which the political objectives and goals of Britain have gone beyond the Falklands issue.

The comrades are now interpreting this to mean any serious warfare - or even any real military conflict. The fact that we were all amazed at the freakish fact that a shooting war did occur may lead some comrades to lose sight of the important distinctions here. The resolution says not war but "full-scale war" which is no longer "restricted to the Falklands issue"

Both politically and militarily the war has remained strictly - one might almost say surgically - confined to the Falklands issue. Bloody and costly it has certainly been - but it has been about the Islands and remained militarily confined to a struggle around the islands

On May 9th at the EC the present minority comrades obviously thought that the war was taking off into a free-wheeling military escalation (evidence for this is in pages one and two of their document: the description/expectation there is of the imminent large-scale/involved of the Argentine mainland).

They were wrong on every count. They forgot about the political assessment of the war we had jointly held in the previous five weeks. They massively overreacted to the first military clashes in the war. In fact they lost their heads a bit. Since then their politics on the war have been shaped by that series of errors, based on impressions that can now plainly be seen to have been grossly mistaken. There was never throughout the entire course of the war any the slightest reason to think the conflict was politically escalating into "full scale war" as defined in the resolution - that is war no longer restricted to the Falklands issue. There wasn't much reason on May 9th to see it as a full-scale war going beyond the Falklands issue - even in the military sense. (Unless we accept surprise when the first clashes occurred as good enough reason for the comrades to extrapolate wildly throwing judgment and our previous assessment to the winds).

And even if it was reasonable on May 9th to form the impression that a full-scale military escalation was occurring (it wasn't), the political points made in the quotation from Lenin above should have guided the comrades. We inevitably get lost politically if we zig zag in response to the ebbs and flows of a military conflict. We base ourselves on the class assessment not this or that episode. Even had their picture of what was happening on May 9th been more precise and accurate their whole method would still have been wrong.

On 'full-scale war' the minority comrades now say: a) it did develop as defined in the resolution and that they adhered to the TILC Resolution's promise to 'defend Argentina' while we reneged on that promise; and b) the TILC resolution was wrong to define it as something "no longer restricted to the Falklands". They want it

both ways. In fact they reneged on the resolution, and it is easy enough to prove it.

Unfortunately for them they have left a trail of evidence. They changed their position at the EC of May 9th, claiming to be developing the previous position in line with events: at that point how did they present their case and argue it? Did they say then, as in effect they do now, that any military clashes between imperialist Britain and non imperialist Argentina amount to 'an attack' on Argentina and that in any military conflict we side with Argentina even if the conflict is "restricted to the Falklands"? Did they say, as in effect they do now, that whether the political assessment we made on the issues, class interests and ruling class objectives in the war were right or wrong they are simply rendered irrelevant by the fact of war 'between an imperialist and a non imperialist' country: that war has the power to retroactively change and transform all the sordidities and injustices that an Argentine Junta may commit on the way to it into the pure gold of Anti-Imperialism?

Did they say any of that then? No they did not. At On May 9th they still argued in terms of the TILC resolution as we had jointly understood it before that date and as the majority understands it now. They argued that the 12 mile limit etc meant that the war had gone beyond the Falklands issue. They invoked the TILC resolution, and, specifically, both parts of the famous sentence (fudging, amalgamating and conflating the fundamental distinction between the political and military aspects of the conflict to do so).

This was politically a nonsense and militarily a gross misjudgment, but it meant that,

how ever confused their reading of the situation in the South Atlantic, they continued implicitly to base themselves on the idea that a distinction was meaningful and necessary between a war "restricted to the Falklands issue" and a political and/or military escalation into "all out war". Their claim - shown irrefutably by the ending of the war to have been nonsense - was that this had happened.

This proves that they interpreted the resolution in the same terms as the majority at that point, and parted company with us initially on an assessment. The rest - the interpretation of the resolution as meaning we were for Arg in any military clash whatever the issue - was to come later; but it came inexorably as the logic of letting military events override, overrule, obscure and finally submerge our political assessment worked itself through.

Now they argue in effect, and to some extent explicitly, that, contrary to the TILC resolution, which distinguished between war for possession of the Falklands and all-out war "no longer restricted to the Falklands issue", that once the shooting started then nothing else mattered. Their case now must be, can only be - in the light of the plain facts now as distinct from their hasty impressions on May 9th - not that the war escalated beyond the Falklands dispute, but that the shooting and the sinking of ships made all political considerations irrelevant.

Deepening and compounding their error of judgment about what was happening on May 9th, and generalising the method implied in the shift they made then, the comrades are close to embracing the method Lenin signatifies as 'philistine' in the passage quoted above as a consciously held set of principles, which turn the

idea that "war is the continuation of politics" into its exact opposite: "politics is a continuation of war, and an appendage of war which changes and shifts in line with the military situation - retrospectively as well".

"THE DEFENCE OF ARGENTINA"

That we must "defend Argentina" is presented to the membership as more or less inseparably coupled with being British defeatists, as the necessary complement to our defeatism. It is presented as axiomatic and pure 'textbook trotskyism', from which the majority has fallen away, that when Argentina, "a non imperialist country is in conflict with Britain, an imperialist country" then we "defend Argentina". The starting point on May 9th was that this was "all-out war" and therefore we had to "defend Argentina". For practical purposes in the discussions and debates this has now become: "this is war, and in war, whatever the issues, we take sides with an Argentina against a Britain - automatically, as a matter of principle".

That's not how it is treated in the TILC resolution which Cde.L. wrote and the rest of us voted for and were guided by for the first five weeks of the crisis.

Written in the full knowledge that the British war fleet was on its way the resolution rejects Argentina's claim to the Falklands, condemns the invasion and calls for withdrawal, and supports the right of the Falklanders to determine their own fate. Now, unless the comrades want to say that the resolution is incoherent gibberish then in that context "defence of Argentina" could only mean if the war developed beyond the Falklands issue and became an attack on Argentina on a scale and for objectives no longer restricted to the Falklands dispute.

The notion that British military action to recover the Falklands would be, ipso facto, an attack on Argentina is entirely ruled out by the political assessment of the dispute in the resolution and by the fact that the resolution, written with the fleet already on its way, made the distinction it made between the conflict going on and "a ll out war" no longer "restricted to the Falklands issue".

The "defence of Argentina" which the comrades now advocate has nothing whatsoever to do with the defence of Argentina, in a certain contingency, which the TILC resolution commits us to.

SUBSTITUTING MILITARY/TECHNICAL FOR POLITICAL DEFINITIONS OF THE WAR

As I argue throughout this document, the comrades, for practical purposes, believe that war (war per se, the fact of war - guns going off) transformed the situation and made the rest of the resolution, apart from the famous sub-clause, irrelevant. No other political definition of their position makes sense of what they have said and done, and of why it was said and done when it was - of their political zig-zags and of their orientation in the war. They stand the notion that "war is the continuation of politics" on its head.

But you don't have to take my word for it. Reread what they wrote.

In their comments on the famous sentence, they openly and explicitly substitute military-technical definitions, and military, not political, readings of key words, for the Marxist definitions in the TILC resolution.

The TILC resolution commitment to defence of Argentina was - it is plain in the text - commitment to defend it in a different war, one "no longer restricted to the Falklands issue". To justify their

shift to defence of Argentina in a war still restricted to the Falklands issue, that is, to justify the attempt to make a 180-degree turn when the shooting started, the comrades give the political terms in the resolution a purely military-technical meaning. Instead of interpreting "all-out war" in terms of political goals and objectives, as the first defining clause about the substance of the dispute indicates, they gave it a military-technical definition. All-out war became XYZ quantity of military action, not a political escalation beyond the issue of the Falklands. Thus they switched to a definition in terms of military incidents within a war undoubtedly still "restricted to the Falklands issue".

WHO DEFINED THINGS SO THAT WE NEVER "DEFEND ARGENTINA"?

It was in the light of an assessment by all of us - majority and minority - that the probability of it was nil, that we wrote the comments and definitions about "full-scale war" on issues "no longer restricted to the Falklands". Just before May 9 the comrades changed their minds about its probability. Afterwards they denounced us for cynically pledging to defend Argentina when - like themselves - we did not expect it to be attacked. This was after they had changed sides and wanted to "defend Argentina" in a limited conflict still politically and militarily "restricted to the Falklands issue".

They say indignantly that we have "defined national liberation and war" in such a way that we will "never be called on to defend Argentina". That, with the stray emotion removed, and translated into a plain statement, means what?

Where, comrades, did we define things so as to rule out ever having to defend Argentina? "In the TILC resolution! We stuck to the political logic and consequences of the joint assessment: you didn't. You voted for it, and indeed one of you wrote it. You voted for it after an open dispute (see below) had left you no possibility of not knowing how the present majority spokesmen saw it. Your indignant cry against definitions that rule out defence of Argentina is a cry against the TILC resolution."

Sure enough, you say explicitly that it is inadequate: "such a stage was never adequately defined at the TILC meeting". This is a tacit admission that you find it impossible to square the resolution entirely with your current position, despite that half-sentence. You are the ones that have shifted, not us.

"Never be called upon to defend Argentina"? That would never do when so many 'Trotskyists' in the world are so enthusiastically "defending Argentina". But not to worry. If we find that our worked-out Marxist analysis cuts us off from this work of defending Argentina, why, we can change our definition (sorry, "develop" it).

And if some part of the organisation says: hold on, you're not developing anything, you are jettisoning our position under pressure of events, you must come to the NC and justify this - why then we can take half a sentence and "develop" that, and denounce those who remain faithful to the whole resolution for reneging, deceit, and duplicity.

THE TILC CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

The account in the tendency document of the discussions at the time of the TILC conference omits the most interesting events and those most relevant to the dispute about the interpretation of the TILC document.

During the TILC conference discussion on the second draft resolution, a sharp division developed in the WSL delegation on the

interpretation of the resolution which we were collectively sponsoring. This was the draft (written by Cunliffe, on the basis of an earlier draft by Kinnell and after a preliminary discussion at the TILC conference) eventually passed by the votes of the WSL and the TAF against the RWL and the LOR after a couple of sentences had been rearranged: as far as I could see the changes, worked out by Kinnell and agreed among all the WSL comrades before going back to the conference, amounted to no perceptible change in the political meaning.

Our delegation decided unanimously to cast the WSL vote for this resolution after a dispute on what it meant which in some important ways prefigured the present dispute on the text, and without any substantial concession from the present majority to the present minority.

What was our disagreement about? In the course of the conference discussion on the text, it became clear that the attitudes and assessments of Kinnell, Traven and myself, which we believed to be expressed in the draft document, were unacceptable to most of the comrades present including Smith, Jones, and Cunliffe. (The major exception was Franco, representing a minority view in his organisation, the LOR). All the others except the Danes (and the Turkish comrades, who abstained) would eventually vote against the resolution.

We had to recess the conference to allow the WSL delegation to discuss the division that had opened in our ranks. Unfortunately no minutes were taken. In the discussion the initial bias of Smith, Jones and Cunliffe was to jettison considerations about the issue (the Falklands) and concrete assessments of the war, and to come out 'for Argentina against imperialism'.

Much of the discussion centred on the attitude to the Falklanders and to similar groups dotted about the world. There was discussion on whether support for the rights of the Falklanders could be separated from explicit or implicit support for the British government's way of 'securing their rights' (we argued that it could), and on the other side of the same question: whether we should hold to and proclaim rights like those of the Falklanders even while opposing Thatcher's war and seeing no immediate way of enforcing them (other than a political transformation of the Argentine working class, and the conquest of power by that class). In other words: should we, even in our definition of the rights and wrongs of an issue, even in our own programme, bow our heads to force and power in the world, and expunge our own assessments and programmatic considerations about the rights of a small community? Should we shape our programme according to our own powerlessness now?

We rejected that approach, and argued that we should proclaim our own programme and rely on the future power of a politically clear working class to achieve it. That power would be helped into being by the programme, and educated by it, but weakened by philistine attitudes to the Falklanders.

I thought it was a very important discussion, in which the political agreement on the EC had made big strides forward. But my impression then, and my opinion now, is that without the participation of Traven in that discussion the gap would not have been bridged, and the division that emerged later would have emerged then.

Nevertheless it was bridged (or seemed to be), and with the support of the Danes we made the resolution TILC policy at the subsequent conference session.

It is in the light of these facts that the character of the

resolution must be seen. It was not casually or thoughtlessly drafted. It was not passed without the present majority/minority positions making an appearance and becoming known, and not without the present minority putting forward (tentatively) a version of their present politics and then withdrawing them.*

In a resolution that took possible war for granted, as the basis of its approach, and which was drafted when the war fleet was on its way, the comrades voted for self-determination and Argentine troops out of the Falklands. And this despite the fact that an Argentine withdrawal forced by the mere threat of the British fleet would have been the most resounding of victories for Thatcher. Such considerations were not then, it seems, the very pivot of world politics that they were to become for the minority. How it is possible to argue that such considerations are suddenly raised to the first rank by the fact that shooting starts, I do not know.

It is perfectly plain, in the resolution taken as a whole, that the commitment to Argentine defensism under changed conditions was an attempt to accommodate the comrades who would have been happier with a straight pro-Argentine position. Was this an unprincipled blurring of the issues? No, it was not, because the definition of when, in what circumstances, we would consider defence of Argentina to be the issue was perfectly well defined in the resolution.

The commitments were spelled out in a perfectly clear and adequate way, and the only 'reservation' (cynical or otherwise) that the present majority spokesmen had was that we considered it utterly improbable that it would become "a full-scale war", no longer "restricted to the Falklands issue". And we said so.

The resolution commits us to 'defence of Argentina' in a different war, clearly distinguished in the text from the "present conflict". It was expressed to accommodate as many comrades as possible, in terms of the (highly remote) possibility that the Falklands war should develop into an imperialist war to subjugate Argentina. The analysis of the issues held in common by the entire WSL TILC delegation and the emotional anti-imperialism of some comrades were thus reconciled rationally in the resolution by an agreement that we would be for the defence of Argentina in the event of an attack on it going beyond the Falklands issue.

Such an attack would, of course, amount to a radical reversal of the modes of modern imperialism. If this happened (it didn't and it won't), then the anachronistic concerns of the textbook Trotskyism of some of our own comrades (and TILC comrades), based on the old colonial-imperialist relations, would apply, and we all, of course, would be Argentine defencists.

We failed to anticipate that some comrades would not be able to wait until Argentina came under attack, and until the issue ceased to be restricted to the Falklands, before they rushed to

* There exists a very pertinent article by Lenin on the issues mentioned above - on the psychological impact on revolutionaries of the brutalising power of imperialism which tramples everything in the mud. It led Bolsheviks like Bukharin and Piatakov, deeply depressed in World War I, to say it was irrelevant in such a world to talk about democratic rights any more. Those comrades who dismiss the Falklanders so lightly - "the population of three streets in Islington" - should read Lenin's comments ('A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism').

defend Argentina; and ~~that~~ they would be able to use this way of trying to reconcile the positions to claim continuity and legitimacy for the very politics rejected by the resolution - the politics held to at the conference by those who rightly and properly voted against the resolution that became TILC policy.

The resolution was perfectly principled, though as it turned out, not adequate to hold the WSL to a class line and to maintain unity on the question with the minority. If the present minority comrades felt they could agree to the procedures because they then expected it would not come to war, and that Thatcher would win a bloodless victory by merely intimidating Galtieri into withdrawing, that is their business. They should not attribute their own methods to us, however.

I don't know how convinced the present minority comrades were when they voted for the resolution. It is plain that they were not fully convinced. They reverted after five weeks to the politics they wanted to adopt before the TILC recess meeting. Their contradiction now is that they have not yet jettisoned the analysis from which we justly draw British and Argentine defeatist conclusions, though they have jettisoned the conclusions that they voted for.

This account should explain to comrades why we have to pore over the meaning of a text passed unanimously by the EC comrades

IS THERE ANY POSSIBLE 'MINORITY' READING OF THE SENTENCE?

There is no possible way in which the famous sentence can reasonably be construed for the minority - not by logic or half-logic, not grammatically, nor even ungrammatically.

To take it in isolation from the whole resolution is utter nonsense. So too is to take the second clause in isolation from the sentence: yet the only way it can be made to seem to speak for the minority is if it stands alone and unqualified. (The tendency know it very well: the way they handle the problem in their document makes it perfectly plain).

For the sentence, taken in complete isolation, to bear the meaning the minority gives to it, the word 'nevertheless' would have to be inserted between the two clauses: "While recognising that the present conflict is restricted to the Falklands issue, nevertheless in the event of a full-scale war between Britain and Argentina we would be unequivocally for the defence of Argentina". Can that word be said to be implied? No, categorically no: in fact the rest of the sentence clearly rules it out. The sentence talks of the 'present' conflict, the one the battleships are sailing to pursue, which is restricted to the Falklands: the present conflict as distinct from some other conflict.

It is not a matter, as it is being misrepresented, for the convenience of the minority, of the "present conflict" being contrasted to war. (Smith's interpretation has been that the "present conflict" refers to Thatcher's attempt to intimidate Galtieri). The resolution takes war for granted as its base-line and discusses slogans for working-class action (e.g. blacking) to stop the war - i.e. to stop the 'present conflict'. "Full-scale war" is contrasted to this war, which the resolution takes seriously enough to call for blacking to stop it.

What if we agree to take the sub-clause in the famous sentence as a separate sentence, not dependent for its meaning on the rest of the sentence? You still have to pretend it is not affected by the meaning of the rest of the resolution, and not even by the 'sentence' coming immediately before it (i.e. in the actual resolution, the main clause of the same sentence). Even then it doesn't work: the immediately preceding sentence would still talk of the "present" conflict, and define it politically in terms of the Falklands issue. The crucial 'sentence' (the subordinate clause in the actual text) would still refer to a different war.

Perhaps the word "present" should not be there, and is only there as a result of sloppiness? Not so. Quite plainly the word "present" links the famous sentence to the political assessments in the rest of the resolution.

Only by rewriting the sentence to something like: "Despite the fact that the conflict is restricted to the Falklands issue, in the event of full-scale war between Britain and Argentina we would support Argentina", can we get the minority's reading. We have to isolate the sentence from the whole resolution, isolate the subordinate clause from the sentence, and then re-write the sentence so that the subordinate clause imparts the sense that the comrades want to give it to the rest of the sentence.

Even then the famous sentence thus rewritten would hang in a political void: there is no reason in the rest of the text as to why "full-scale war" (imprecisely defined) would lead us to shelve all the political considerations in the rest of the resolution. There would therefore be this massive contradiction: while the rest of the resolution was drafted according to the Leninist method exemplified in the quotation at the head of this article (what are the issues in this war, which classes are pursuing what political objectives), the unique sentence would reach conclusions by way of a radically different method.

This would parallel the actual method, trajectory, and zig-zags of the minority, and reproduce its contradictions: for, of course, their attempts to take the sentence in isolation are a consequence of their taking the military events in isolation.

In this way we would arrive at a conclusion that we just classify the disputants according to "camps" (imperialist and non-imperialist) and read off which side to support from that. That is the actual position the comrades did arrive at some time after their change of direction on May 9. But such a method and way of doing it contradicts the entire approach of the rest of the resolution. If we adopt that method, then what business did the TILC conference have with the considerations the resolution deals with, at a time when the imperialist war fleet was on its way to the South Atlantic? If we can take sides, and are obliged to take sides, automatically according to the labels imperialist and non-imperialist, then we should have done so from day 1.

When Smith and others expected that the war fleet would intimidate Galtieri, and therefore that it was all right for them to vote for the politics of the present majority, was that not reprehensible - a gross failure to see and perform their anti-imperialist duty? If what Smith and others are saying now is even half right, then certainly it was.

THE METHOD OF A 'MINORITY' READING

If we meant the minority interpretation of the TILC resolution, then what method would we have followed? We would have constructed a resolution with a whole page of political considerations for peacetime

(including an analysis of the politics of which a war would be the "continuation") - and inserted a fall-back sentence to allow us to ditch all that when the shooting actually started.

This would be the method of the right and centre in the old Second International, and of all sorts of pacifists and others in the labour movement now, who go along from day to day, living politically hand to mouth, and have one set of politics for peacetime and others for wartime.

Of course the subjective impulses of the comrades, their sympathies, their relationship to our own ruling class, are those of revolutionaries, and have nothing in common with the reformists and pacifists. Their method is identical, however. For them too war is not the continuation of politics. It blanks out all previous political considerations - at least when it is between "representatives" of what the comrades construe (preposterously) as two camps, or (unbelievably) as two class camps.

It is surely now plain and clear to any reasoning comrade that to rewrite the famous sentence, or to interpret it as if it should be so rewritten, is not remotely justified. It presupposes a level of muddled thinking and sloppiness in language that it is not reasonable to attribute to Cunliffe, or to the rest of us who read, discussed, vetted and voted on two drafts of a resolution to arrive at the final text. We meant to say what this resolution says. The present minority - with whatever reservations - meant to say what the resolution says. We meant the sub-clause to refer to a different war, to an improbable contingency.

Everyone at the meeting - whether they supported the resolution or opposed it - would have been amazed to be told that the clause about "full-scale war" was the hidden core of the resolution, the seed of an entire new position which would need only the shedding of blood in the South Atlantic to blossom forth, politically devouring the rest of the resolution as it developed.

THE SENTENCE: CONCLUSION

But the best is yet to come. For where did the all-effacing sentence come from? It was drafted by Cd Cunliffe on the suggestion of Cd Franco of the LOR.

Cd Franco had been mandated by his organisation to propose a pro-Argentine position at the TILC conference. He himself agreed essentially with the present WSL majority. He suggested that one way of clarifying the position, and relating to the concerns of the pro-Argentine comrades, was to implicitly classify possible British/Argentine wars into the one going on (as analysed in the bulk of the TILC resolution and in Kinnell's original resolution), and in contrast the sort of war that some comrades (basing themselves on "the books" and the movement's policies for China in 1937, etc.) tended to see it as.

In that way we could relate rationally to the junta's "Falklands adventure" and to "the present conflict", "restricted to the Falklands issue", and contrast it to another sort of conflict for which the conclusions of the Trotskyists on China in 1937 would be appropriate.

(I was absent for the first session, which discussed the draft by Kinnell. My account is based on what Kinnell and Cunliffe tell me. Cunliffe confirms that the proposal for the sentence came from Franco. He cannot remember how the suggestion was motivated).

Despite their pretences that it is otherwise, the comrades are well aware of their difficulties over the resolution, and even on their cherished sentence. On page 5 of the tendency document they quote the sentence accurately, but then blandly go on to talk of the two clauses as "sentences", and the sentence as a "paragraph". They substitute the loose phrase "over the Falklands" (in quotation marks) for the sharper one in the resolution: "restricted to the Falklands issue." Thus they make their own "revolution in the resolution".

In its own way this is an admission - perhaps an unconscious admission - by the comrades that logic and the grammatic (not to speak of the political) sense of the resolution are firmly on our side and not theirs.

To accept the minority's interpretation is reasonable, you have to suspend the laws of grammar, and believe that the subordinate clause is meant to carry the decisive and all-qualifying meaning of the sentence. You have to turn upside down the normal Marxist understanding of the relation between military affairs and politics. You have to believe that a phrase which on its own could refer to a mere military escalation is more important than the political definition. And you have to believe that the limited war that took place for the Falklands and around the Falklands was an all-out war, an 'attack' on Argentina.

PART 2

READ THE REST OF THE RESOLUTION!

Look at the whole TILC resolution and this is perfectly plain.

We did anticipate war.

Para.3: "We call for the immediate recall of the British battle fleet, and campaign against any military action or war over the Falklands, which can only be designed to preserve a relic of empire and shore up the prestige of British imperialism. Any such war could have only reactionary consequences in the form of loss of life and a chauvinistic fervour in both the Argentine and British working classes".

The first sentence expresses the common ground of our common defeatism towards Britain. Nobody has moved from it, and the paper has expressed it in a version of Karl Liebknecht's and Rosa Luxemburg's slogan: The enemy is at home.

The second sentence plainly envisages war - even war as distinct from mere skirmishes ("military action"). It nevertheless equates the chauvinist fervour of both the Argentine and British working classes in such a war. There is not the slightest hint that such a war would be a great symbolic clash of imperialism and anti-imperialism.

Para 4: "In taking its action, the junta has acted not against imperialism, but in a populist ploy designed to divert and unite the Argentine masses behind the Generals' own repressive rule". No hint there of the magic processes that would soon transform this into serious anti-imperialism - and indeed into a struggle on a higher level (the international confrontation of "class camps") than the working class movement that the junta aimed to divert.

However we assessed the probability of serious war, the resolution spells out our policy and our assessment for the eventuality of war.

Para 5: "... the Argentine dictators have trampled upon the rights of the Falkland inhabitants, who in themselves oppress and threaten no-one and should have the right to decide their own

future" (emphasis added). "Such action does nothing to build anti-imperialist consciousness in the Argentine working class, but rather seeks to generate chauvinism and 'national unity'. We do not support this action and call for the withdrawal of Argentine troops".

The comrades, when they voted for this, had yet to realise that Peronist chauvinism in the Argentine working class would soon be transformed into best anti-imperialism by the shooting of British and Argentine guns when the British fleet reached the South Atlantic. They had still to realise that the assessment made above reflected "a complete lack of faith in the genuine anti-imperialism of the masses" (IB 7, p.10).

Para. 7 contains the famous sentence. Para. 8 states ^t our position plainly as for the Argentine working class - not for Argentina.

"We call upon the British and international working class to render all possible assistance to the Argentine workers in their struggle against the Galtieri dictatorship, for the establishment of a genuinely anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina".

This might conceivably be reconciled with Marxist defencism such as we had for China in 1937. But it cannot, while language remains something higher than gibberish, be reconciled with the sort of Argentine defencism put forward in the tendency document and in IB 7 - based on the idea that the confrontation of international "camps" stands higher than the class struggle in Argentina.

The last line of the last paragraph calls on the British labour movement to use the crisis to topple Thatcher, and to give "all material and political support to the Argentine workers in the fight for democratic and trade union rights". It does not, with the British fleet speeding towards war, "restricted to the Falklands issue", call on the British labour movement to aid the Argentine workers to defend their country (as we would have done for China in 1937). By deliberate choice, in a resolution written for the eventuality of war, it is not/call to aid the Argentine state in a liberation struggle or a 'symbolic' anti-imperialist struggle (the comrades didn't think of that until later). It is a direct call for action to the Argentine workers to overthrow the Argentine government - which has just committed an act of war against our own and faces retaliation. There could not be a more calculated distinction from the government and its lying pretence of anti-imperialism. Plainly it is meant that the Argentine workers should pursue the class struggle without regard to the effects on the war, and take advantage of the war to smash the junta.

On page 1 of the tendency document, "the defeat of your own ruling class by the working class" is presented as incompatible with defencism. We would not accept that. We would not accept that even a genuine war for the national liberation of Argentina stood higher than the class struggle within Argentina. But given the comrades' concept of defencism, it is plain that when they voted for the TILC resolution, they voted for defeatism for Argentina.

Part 3

DID WE SEE ARGENTINA AS QUALITATIVELY DIFFERENT FROM BRITAIN?

We are now in a position to discuss some of the substantive issues raised by the minority. I will confine myself to issues with a direct bearing on the resolution.

Does the resolution show that we (all of us at the TILC conference, and specifically the representatives of the majority on the EC) "saw a war between Britain and Argentina as something different to an inter-imperialist war"? (emphasis in original).

Now the minority have not spent much energy on arguing: they emote, orate and rant about "imperialism" instead. This is one of the weightier of the arguments they have used. If I understand it, the argument is that if we could ever support Argentina, it can't be imperialist or sub-imperialist; and if it isn't imperialist, then we should always support it in a war with an imperialist power. (There are further implications and allegations of bad faith, duplicity, etc, to which I will come back).

This argument is linked to the TILC resolution. But those who have read the earlier parts of this document will know, however, that such a position (automatic support for Argentina in a war with Britain, read off mechanically from the designation of one as imperialist and the other non-imperialist) is in fact incompatible with the TILC resolution. This argument emerged in fact only after the minority broke radically with the politics of the TILC resolution: they threw it back over their shoulders at us, so to speak, as they moved to the positions they codify in their documents.

In the first place, no-one (with the exception of one member of the NC and one comrade in Glasgow) says that the Argentine-British war was not "something different to an inter-imperialist war". But that doesn't mean that it was a national war of liberation on the Argentine side! It was a war between an imperialist power (in serious decline - which evoked the Argentine action) and a developed capitalist country which has long been a 'big power' in the region; which aspires to an imperialist role; which acts as a sub-imperialism in the region for US imperialism.

The comrades apparently think that it had to be either one or the other, either an inter-imperialist war or a national liberation war. Argentina has to be either fully imperialist or fully non-imperialist. In fact they go further, seemingly believing that if Argentina is not imperialist, then it is anti-imperialist (even under the bourgeois junta, pursuing a diversion that would be trivial even if the islands were populated by Argentines wanting to join Argentina, and totally irrelevant in terms of economic imperialism).

In the second place, we committed ourselves to defend Argentina in specific conditions - of an imperialist attack on its national integrity of the sort known in the past by the big powers on countries reduced to political/military (not just economic) dependence, to colonies or semi-colonies.

In the third place, the resolution was written to reconcile the gap between the analysis which makes up the political content of the resolution and the concerns of the "textbook Trotskyists". Some comrades can choose to say that it does somewhere commit us to defend Argentina and never mind the details, that's enough for them. But for those who choose to read it, it is plainly spelled out that there are some wars in which we do not support Argentina against Britain - wars like "the present conflict", wars not concerned with Argentine rights but "restricted to the Falklands issue", wars on an issue where Argentina is in the wrong and in relation to the islanders is an oppressor (mini-colonialist or mini-imperialist, whatever term you like).

That is what the tribunes of the present minority voted for, and committed the WSL and the TILC to, after the British armada had sailed. The notion that if you were ever for Argentina against imperialism, then you must always be - and if you weren't you were "capitulating to imperialism" - all that came later. All that belongs to a different set of politics from those contained in the resolution that the WSL presented to the TILC conference and pushed through TILC.

In the fourth place, to commit one self to the defence of Argentina in a different situation (while clearly defining the present situation and spelling out a principled stand in relation to it) is not to commit oneself to the view that there is much probability that the other, hypothetical, situation will soon arise.

In the fifth place, the resolution does not talk of war in general, in the abstract. Following Lenin's method, it discusses which war, waged by whom and for what objectives. Essentially the entire argument of the comrades here is a metaphysical schema, which commits them to automatic support for anything less than a full imperialist power in a conflict with an imperialist power.

This argument is like Galtieri's invasion of the Falklands - a complete diversion from the important issues. The charge of bad faith on our part, of reneging on commitments, of bending under pressure, etc. - which seems to be the main part of their argument - is ludicrous in the light of what the resolution actually says. In the resolution that they drafted and voted for at the TILC conference, the present minority saw the Falklands war as something radically different from a war for Argentine national rights, and different from a war with an anti-imperialist content on one side. And then they changed their minds.

In fact they admit this, in their own way (i.e. wrapping it up in phrases about the alleged crimes of the majority). The tendency document admits that "the stage of an all-out war" "was never adequately defined at the TILC meeting". This is their way of reassuring themselves that, though they are on very shaky grounds with their current politics, the fault nevertheless lies in the resolution.

It is simply not true that the TILC document failed to adequately define "full-scale war". We have seen that even if you rewrite the sentences, it is close to impossible to separate the words "all-scale war" from the political definition which gives it a meaning that has nothing in common with the meaning that the minority give it. By "never adequately defined" they mean that they disagree with and have abandoned the definition they voted for.

ARGENTINA'S NATIONAL RIGHTS

One of the difficulties in the discussion, but also one of the most easily accessible hard facts, is that the minority have changed their definition of Argentine national rights.

In the TILC resolution there is a complete rejection of Argentina's claim to the Falklands, and therefore of the idea that Argentine national rights are involved in the conflict, so long as it remains "restricted to the Falklands issue". Now, while the minority still say that Argentina had no rights before the invasion, they seem to define Argentine national rights as including the right "to recover what it thinks is its property" (tendency document). So where it had no national rights, it can quickly acquire them!

This definition of national rights is new in the Trotskyist movement. Argentina has national rights to anything it chooses to do, demand, claim, or seize - provided only that it is demanded, claimed, or seized from imperialism! The evils of imperialism justify, sanction, and make good anything done or claimed against it by a non-imperialist state. By sending a war fleet, an imperialist state can even turn an irrelevant act of mini-colonialism, designed for Argentine nationalist consumption, into a genuine act of anti-imperialism. The conflict between the imperialist states and the non-imperialist capitalist states (whose most petty or repugnant deeds they transform by their reaction to them) is absolute - they are in opposed "class camps" (IB 7).

Therefore the working class and Marxists cannot make an independent judgment - or if, as in the TILC resolution, we do, then we must abandon it and adopt the definitions of a Galtieri.

DOES THE MINORITY REALLY WANT TO PRESERVE THE STATE APPARATUS OF ARGENTINA?

One of the most radical departures the minority has made from the TILC resolution and from a class point of view, and one of the most amazing and indefensible, is in their attitude to the Argentine state.

The TILC resolution advocates that Argentine workers should take advantage of the war to overthrow the junta. The comrades, as we shall see, reject this. On page 1 they characterise defeatism as:

"the defeat of your own ruling class by the working class... 'the main enemy is at home'... workers and soldiers turn your guns on your own officers and ruling class... both working classes defeat your own ruling class; the outcome of the war is irrelevant; a victory for one side would not be more progressive than the other" - and they reject this attitude apparently in toto.

Then, in the course of arguing against the TILC resolution, they emerge as people concerned with the preservation of the Argentine state apparatus.

The TILC resolution "never adequately defined" all-out war, they say. Events showed that all-out war could occur while the issue remained the Falklands and the war remained confined to the islands and the seas around them. How?

They admit that they are on different ground from the TILC conference discussion. "In debate, views were expressed that this stage (all-out war) would come in the event of an attack on the Argentine mainland". (Not quite: bombing of Argentine air bases could have been an attack on the mainland but still part of a war which remain restricted to the Falklands issue). "This was plainly inadequate, and has to be reassessed in the light of the unfolding of real events".

"A full-scale war involving the destruction of most of the Argentine navy and airforce, and much of its army, could conceivably take place without ever involving the Argentine mainland. It would be a false distinction to hold a neutral position on a bloody war raging between Argentine state power (emphasis added) and British imperialism in the south Atlantic and Falklands, and switch to the defence of Argentina only in the event of air strikes on mainland bases which would be part of the same war".

(Yes it would. The approach of the TILC resolution would forbid such a switch. In the document I wrote before the May 16 NC I argued that bombing of mainland air bases would not be "full-scale war", but part of the Falklands war).

But what an amazing explanation these comments are of what concerns the comrades. The comrades' Argentine defensism is expressed as concern for the Argentine military machine, in conditions where Argentina's national integrity was not threatened, where the war was hundreds of miles from the Argentine mainland, and where the destruction of the military machine would have had nil impact on Argentine national independence!

The Argentine military caste is the prop of the bourgeoisie, its agency of repression, and control over the economically militant Argentine working class. It has had essentially no other function for a century. We should be - and are - for the utter destruction

and dismemberment of the military machine of Argentina. It is a good result of the war if it does that without bringing on the Argentine people a fate similar to China's in 1937.

(No, comrades, that does not mean I therefore favoured British victory. There are good reasons why this or any other assessment of this or that outcome does not determine our overall position, which is conditioned by Britain being an imperialist power).

Why concretely, practically, in terms of politics and the likely consequences for the Argentine people, do the comrades consider the destruction of the Argentine military machine a decisively bad result of the war? Because their way of proceeding from super-abstract labels (imperialist/non-imperialist) to the politics of symbolic anti-imperialism leads them to stand our politics on their head.

Their version of defencism is not what Trotskyist defencism would be (we were for the overthrow of Chiang Kai Shek and the bourgeoisie in 1937, as a prerequisite for best defending China). They define the Argentine capitalist state as being in our "class camp" (IB 7). They have apparently forgotten the ABC of Lenin and Trotsky on how we relate to a bourgeois regime when together with it we face a common imperialist enemy. In practical politics this leads them to become champions of the Argentine military!

That is not what they want, or what they intend, or what they will stick to when they sober up. It is where their political conclusions have led them for now.

It is a pure example of the consequences of putting military/technical definitions above political definitions, and of dealing in labels and symbols: the self-definition as not being neutral between "Argentine state power" and British imperialism, and the concern for the fate of the Argentine military machine on its expedition to conquer and annexe a non-Argentine population, does have the merit of clearly showing up the politics of the comrades.

When they sober up they will abandon this nonsense. But they have not sobered up yet. Right now (beginning of July) the Argentine junta has been shaken and discredited. Argentina is in political turmoil, and the chances of the military grip of the bourgeoisie being shattered are good. Without qualification, this is a splendid development for working class politics.

The junta and the bourgeoisie have suffered a humiliation, but the Argentine people have not suffered a defeat with any harmful consequences. The Argentine chauvinists cry in the streets; the class-conscious Argentine workers have nothing to cry about. Yet read the assessments in IB 7: the comrades talk of a real defeat for our "class camp".

They are so far from class politics that the prospect of the lifting of the iron tombstone which the Argentine military, on behalf of the bourgeoisie, had held in place ^{over} the Argentine workers for six years, seems to them to be irrelevant. (And they combine this with demagogy about our "lack of faith" in the masses).

When the Argentine junta falls, and the Argentine labour movement regains the right to function - that will be a great day for the Latin American and international working class. The defeat of the junta, the cruelly humiliating debacle of its crazy adventure in the Falklands, has brought that day much nearer. The pity of it is that the whole cadre of the military machine of Argentina was not pulverised and sunk to the bottom of the South Atlantic.

Those comrades who find their "anti-imperialism" outraged by such a sentiment have forgotten the ABC of class politics, let alone of Trotskyist politics. And to judge from the tendency's second document, they have - for the moment - forgotten how to register even half-accurately what is going on in the political world around them.

THE MINORITY HAVE ABANDONED THE TILC COMMITMENT TO SELF DETERMINATION FOR THE FALKLANDERS

The attitude of the TILC resolution to the Falkland islanders is clearly that they have the right to self-determination. Self-determination for Leninists means the right to secede from a given state, the right of a given population to have independence or to adhere to the state of their choice. Its basic idea is the fullest democracy without any regard for the existing state boundaries, and on that groundwork the promotion of working class international unity.

The tendency document: (1) states that "Argentine workers have no interest in the armed occupation of the Falklands against the wishes of the population" (p.9); but also (2) cancels this out as follows:

"... if the settlers were a distinct and viable community and were asking for self-determination, we would support them. Geographical or historical arguments would not apply. But they are not asking for self-determination. They are militantly pro-imperialist and determined to stay that way" (p.7).

Distinct they are. They are asking to determine for themselves what state to be attached to and what state not to be seized by. Viable? What is viable? Who decides? The insistence of the comrades that self-determination can only mean independence, therefore cannot apply to populations who do not want an independent state, means either that they do not agree with the profoundly revolutionary Leninist attitude to the question, or (more probably) that they are not familiar with the writings of Lenin on this very important question.

Falklanders

There is no doubt that the Falklanders reject inclusion into Argentina. "But", now say the comrades who voted for the TILC document, "they are not asking for self-determination. They are militantly pro-imperialist and determined to stay that way".

If that is a proper way to define the situation now, and if these considerations are decisive now, they should have been decisive when we jointly drafted the TILC resolution which says they "should have the right to decide their own future". Why did the comrades not say that then?

The Falklanders would be imperialist only if their role were imperialist - only if their being on the islands helped Britain dominate and exploit Argentina. That is not the case and never has been. They are actually an isolated pocket of British people, the sole inhabitants of their islands. Apart from a couple of dozen creoles 150 years ago they are probably the only community that has ever inhabited these bleak islands.

From any democratic - or Leninist - point of view, 'viability' is for them to work out as best they can, and not for the Argentine bourgeoisie to dispose of them. 1 to

principle involved.

Numbers have no consequences for the

The comrades redefine the TILC document commitment to the view that the islanders should decide their own future by redefining self-determination to mean only independence. Those who do not argue for independence, or cannot plausibly aspire to it, are not exercising self-determination.

This view is not that of Lenin, the Communist International, or the Trotskyist movement. For example, in east and central Europe, where pockets of many nationalities were at the time of the Bolsheviks (and in many cases still are) scattered through different states, self-determination would have been largely cancelled out by such an interpretation of it as meaning 'stay where you are or independence'.

The Falklanders reportedly express their self-determination not by wanting independence (though there is now talk of it), but by wanting to remain with Britain. To talk about a plainly British overseas population as pro-imperialist is to play with words and to obscure the issue. It uses labels about the islanders' political ideas to obscure the issue of what rights can this community, existing where it does, reasonably claim to exercise over its own destiny? Does it have, or does it not have, the important negative right not to be annexed by a foreign state?

A parallel example may clarify. 15 miles off the coast of Canada there is an inhabited island, St Pierre, which is part of the French state. Would we say that the people of this island have a right to self-determination only if they desire independence? Would we describe them as "pro-imperialist" and therefore forfeiting all rights if they wish to remain part of France? Or would we not simply say that the islanders should have the right to decide which state they want to be part of?

The Falklanders are a British community which oppresses and exploits no other community, and which is not an instrument in such oppression. The community is geographically isolated from Argentina by 400 miles of the Atlantic ocean, and has existed on the islands 30, 50, 100 years longer than the great bulk of the present population of Argentina. Why should it not control its own destiny, even if that means retaining ties with Britain?

There is no Marxist, socialist, internationalist, democratic, or anti-imperialist reason why it should not. The notion that it is a British community (not pro-British, not pro-imperialist - British), and since Britain is imperialist we are for grinding every such pocket into the ground, has nothing in common with Marxism or even bourgeois democracy.

If the Falklanders exploited another population, if the islands were a base against Argentina, it would be different. As far as I know, no-one even alleges that that is the case, or likely to be. (The notion that the Falkland islanders are now oppressors because without their existence the junta would not have had to invade, and therefore would not have suffered defeat... that notion shows what thinking in labels and "camps" does to your brain!)

The comrades misuse the political term "pro-imperialist" to try to define away the question of the rights of the Falklands as a distinct community - which is the proper content of a discussion on self-determination. In fact they try to define the community and its rights out of existence except as political ciphers. From the point of view of the TILC resolution, upholding the Falklanders' rights, the comrades have now shifted to the belief that the islanders' only operational right is the right to a sacrificial role in the 'symbolic' anti-imperialist drama the comrades imagine to have been going on.

The comrades say (in the tendency document): "We cannot subordinate the world political situation to the Falkland settlers and give them an imperialist (?) veto". (Veto on what? Veto on being annexed by a foreign military dictatorship, or for that matter by a foreign bourgeois democracy? Veto on being a morsel on the menu by which the Argentine junta tries to stimulate and satisfy chauvinist appetites in the Argentine masses?) "To do so", continue the comrades, "would ignore the class politics (!!) involved". So the Falklands are the pivot on which the world situation moves? What on earth are the comrades talking about?

The TILC resolution rightly said that the junta had dealt no blow to imperialism by seizing the Falklands; now the comrades have moved so far in pursuit of their "symbolic" anti-imperialism that what was for them at Easter a freak conflict is now of world-defining importance - the axis of world politics. And they get wilder and wilder. In the debates comrade Smith has said that the genocidal war in the Lebanon was sparked by the Falklands war.

No doubt the war in the South Atlantic was a factor in when the Israelis launched their war. But they have long been preparing it. More decisive factors behind the war were the fact that the Arab oil weapon is not so potent, with the present glut; that the Iraqis have suffered defeat; and that Israel/Egypt relations have been normalised.

But I haven't understood whether Smith was blaming the Falklanders (because they 'provoked' the junta into defeat), or the WSL majority, for the Lebanon war! There would be a daft logic to the first alternative - not even a crazy logic to the second. We did everything we could to hinder British imperialism.

The minority's shift from supporting self-determination for the Falklanders to ridiculous accounts of the world situation, in which the actual issues are totally lost, is the best proof that the method of Lenin, quoted above and followed by the majority, is a better tool than speculation on 'symbolic' showdowns with imperialism. We ask: what are the issues at stake, which classes are waging the war, and with what political objectives.

IS LENIN ON THE IMPERIALIST WAR IRRELEVANT TO THE FALKLANDS WAR?

I quoted Lenin at the beginning of this article to set out what I believe to be the proper Marxist method for assessing a war. It will, of course, be objected that this is not applicable to the Falklands war because Lenin referred to World War 1. But read what he says. The methods and judgments and criteria he outlines apply to all wars. It is the different answers to the questions posed that establish for us the difference between one war and another.

If you proceed from these criteria, you arrive at an analysis of the concrete situation, general categories and divisions of wars, and the role of certain types of state in wars. If you try to read off an attitude to a war from the bare characterisation of imperialist/non-imperialist, then you pulp, scrap, dispense with, the sort of criteria Lenin uses. They become irrelevant. All the substance of an independent class viewpoint is scrapped, and the working class is to take sides on the crudest of broad categories.

This is the essence of the difference. Nowhere do we take sides apart from certain criteria. The apparent 'automatic' taking of sides - with a colony, with a workers' state, with a deformed or degenerated workers' state - is a matter of shorthand ways of saying that a block of like criteria exist for us. But if we confine

ourselves to the textbook labels, there is a danger of phasing out the basic criteria, of thinking in unwieldy unarticulated block-concepts. Inevitably, sooner or later, you will find that they are less concrete than necessary in a given situation.

In the case of a workers' state we have an automatic identification of interest, programme and so on. In the case of a colony in revolt, we side with the oppressed because their assertion of their full national rights is a necessary part of arousing them to struggle for socialism, and because no nation that oppresses another can itself be free. In the case of a deformed or degenerated workers' state, we normally find ourselves violently hostile to the ruling bureaucracy, but take sides in defence of the nationalised property and against the strengthening of imperialism. In all these cases we take sides not with the names of things, but with the struggle - however led - for self-determination or to preserve nationalised property, etc; and in all cases we take sides against imperialism, concretely against it feeding and strengthening itself.

In each case the answer to the questions: "what issues are at stake in the war, which classes are waging it, and with what political objectives", determines our attitude.

By this method, the conclusion is less automatic in a case of a war between advanced capitalist powers in which neither's national rights are threatened. We oppose the settlement of disputes by war (if comrade Smith, who found the notion of reconciliation between the British and Argentine peoples puzzling in a Trotskyist paper, will allow me to say so). Certainly in such a case the categories imperialist and non-imperialist are meaningless. None of the issues that would make us take sides between China and Japan in 1937 or between a US invasion and Nicaragua in 1982 (or between the USSR and Nazi Germany in 1941) existed in the Falklands war.

The reason why the minority comrades, determined to 'take sides' according to the super-abstract labels imperialist and non-imperialist, have turned Lenin's method on its head, is precisely because - as they recognised for the first 5 weeks of the conflict - rationally assessed from a working class viewpoint there was little to take sides about.

OUR DUPLICITY

The comrades accuse us - in more or less diplomatic language depending on the circumstances - of duplicity. They understood, they say, that we had committed ourselves to the famous half-sentence with the meaning that they now give to it.

As we have seen, all this came rather late in the day. On May 9 they argued not that we had to support Argentina if a shooting war started over the Falklands, but that we failed to understand that it was now all-out war, going beyond the Falklands issue to involve Argentine national rights (the 12 mile limit etc.)

Whether or not they thought this through I don't know. I do know that they have no right to believe what they say.

The text of the TILC resolution, and the record of the successive stages of their own political development, from the TILC resolution through to IB 7, tell a plain story.

The majority, together with the minority, worked out an analysis of the Falklands conflict which proved more or less adequate. The

fact that it came to a shooting war which we did not expect did not affect this, since the TILC resolution had been written for the contingency that the war would take place. The majority kept strictly to the TILC resolution at all points.

The minority allowed themselves to be convinced of the politics of the TILC resolution. Then on May 9 they doubled back on themselves, and since then have been moving away from the TILC resolution. The first tendency document was a long way politically from the TILC document. The second document has moved very far from the first document. Now it is all a matter of how "tight" the "international balance of forces" is and so on.

I find it impossible to believe that anybody in the tendency can really think that their current politics are the same as those of the TILC resolution. The gap is now too wide for any of them to pretend to themselves that they merely 'developed' the TILC resolution's politics.

Yet they still go on about our duplicity in "pretending" to commit ourselves to defending Argentina, etc. Why? There are no doubt good psychological reasons (their current judgment in IB 7 must force them to a very poor opinion of themselves as they were at the TILC conference: it is no doubt much less painful for them to concentrate on denouncing us.) But there are other reasons.

Theirs is a record of instability, inconsistency of method, and consistently muddled judgment. Yet in IB 7 they take their stand very much on their ability to assess "the international balance of forces" and its "tightness" (whatever that means - the opposite "looseness"?)

Their record so far is not a good advertisement for the judgment and assessment on which the credibility of their current politics depends. That is why they pretend to maintain consistency with TILC and talk about our duplicity. But there is nothing in the TILC resolution to support the crazy inverted pyramid of considerations, with the war as the point on which the "international balance of forces" balances, that they now lose themselves in.

In fact the TILC resolution is, like the Falklands war, now a matter of history. In any event the minority parted company with that resolution on May 9. Some comrades (Jones, Levy, Smith) have begun to backtrack towards Morrow's position that we made a mistake at the TILC conference. When or if the whole of the tendency completes the processes - and recognises that if they want to continue the politics of the TILC resolution they must side with the majority - then we can get away from this stupid dispute about who defended and who reneged on the politics we jointly agreed at the TILC conference.

Thomas Carolan 1-7-8 2