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GRENADA - What does it mean for the world situation?

Smith

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The US invasion of Grenada yesterday is a very major escalation of the US war drive on a world scale. It is an open act of war designed to establish a government in Grenada acceptable and controlled by the USA. More than that, it escalates the world political situation to a level where open military intervention, possibly even full-scale invasion, is now on the cards for El Salvador and Nicaragua.

This situation is the product of a world situation which has changed drastically over the last four years to the advantage of imperialism. The US war drive has been escalating since the Nicaraguan revolution and the decision of the USA to hold the line in El Salvador. The invasion of the Malvinas by the Thatcher government in Britain and their subsequent victory over Argentina became an important turning point in that process. Thatcher's task force was the green light for imperialism to use the military force available to it to regain what it had lost since its Vietnam defeat and turn the tide against national liberation struggles. Indeed Begin justified his invasion of the Lebanon that way. (If Mrs Thatcher can defend her interests 8,000 miles away, we can defend ours 60 miles away.)

Our internal debates on the Malvinas war revealed probably the most serious differences between the two former traditions that there is. It involves our overall view of the world, how it divides up and the nature and role of world imperialism. The Grenada invasion however sheds very important new light on that debate, which should now be examined. It is just not possible to look at Grenada in other than the context of the world situation.

One of the key differences in the Malvinas debate was our contention (at that time the minority) that a Thatcher victory would have a serious effect on the "world balance of class forces" to the advantage of imperialism. We said it would be a major boost to the US war drive and would worsen the conditions under which liberation struggles would be conducted in places like Central America, the Middle East and Southern Africa.

The Carolan Kinnell Hill leadership of the current majority in the movement have argued strongly against this view. The Malvinas war **does not** feature in the analysis of the world situation projected by the movement. I introduced a resolution at the last NC to try to alter that situation. Carolan at a recent EC repeated his view that the Falklands war was an "anachronism", something which was repeated often in the debate at the time. In document seven we set out our views on the relationship between the war and the world situation in the following way: (this is the whole section)

The international balance of forces

The last period has seen several successes for the anti-imperialist struggle. Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Iran, Nicaragua - the

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

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

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

Now the war in itself guarantees nothing for imperialism. But that is only because the working class and anti-imperialist masses may have the strength to absorb the blow that an imperialist victory would be. But we have to ask our comrades in the majority - how can we who aim to lead the working class to revolutionary victory be neutral about blows from the class enemy against it? Even more so, how can we be neutral about those

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

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

In IB 12, Kinnell challenges that view, and we put a lengthy rejoinder in IB 15 as follows:

The minority starting point

For the minority, Thatcher's decision to go to war made the international dimension the key factor. Far from being a "Falklands issue", the war had become a world issue of considerable importance. Thatcher's decision had made it a war of imperialist authority. Imperialism would now use it to try to reestablish its ability to use a military option around the world which it had lost to such a serious degree in Vietnam and since. It would use it to demonstrate its ability to crack the whip and make the oppressed nations jump back into line. In other words, Galtieri's move had changed from an invasion with reactionary aims into a war between an imperialist power and an oppressed nation. Its outcome would seriously affect the world political situation. A Thatcher defeat would be a serious setback for imperialism, whilst a Thatcher victory would strengthen imperialism all over the world. It would as we have said alter the balance of forces on a world scale to the advantage of imperialism.

The majority staked a lot on attacking our reference to a "world balance of forces". Sometimes they have denied its existence, at others they have called it "intangible", "amorphous" or ridiculed it. At other times, they have effectively accepted our point, such as comrade C's admission on p.20 of IB 9 that Thatcher's war was a factor in the Lebanon invasion. "No doubt the war in the South Atlantic was a factor in when the Israelis launched their war".

However much that quote underplays the situation, it accepts the basic point, that the Malvinas war created an international situation in which Begin felt he could launch a war of genocide against the Palestinians. (If Thatcher could defend her interests 8,000 miles away, he could defend his 60 miles away, he said). It concedes that Thatcher's war has increased the ability of imperialism to use its military option.

An ambivalent attitude to the strengths and weaknesses of imperialism

and its ability to suppress opposition to its rule is a mentality which can only really be projected from a relatively safe position within one of the imperialist powers, and a determination to ignore the international dimension of the conflict. Seen from the Middle East, Central America, Soweto or Namibia, the "world balance of class forces" is a very tangible issue indeed. Liberation fighters in Salvador know exactly how tangibly an imperialist victory anywhere in the world affects them. Nor should these majority comrades ridicule our reference to a "tight situation in terms of the world balance of forces". We simply mean that it is easily shifted one way or the other at the present time by world events, making Thatcher's war more dangerous. It sometimes seems as if the majority comrades fail to think in international terms at all, except in the most general way.

In fact, a failure to think in international terms seems to be the only way to explain how the comrades can appreciate the importance of assessing the relationship of forces on a national level, but not an international level. The comrades would have a very good assessment of how the ASLEF betrayal altered the relationship of forces in Britain to the advantage of the Tory government and the employers. They wouldn't say that was "intangible" or "amorphous", they would say it is very real and very dangerous. They would recognise that the ability and confidence of the Tories to attack other sections of workers is strengthened by it. Yet when we talk about the strengths and weaknesses of imperialism, it is used as one of the reasons to call us Maoist. Thatcher made her assessment. Her summary of the result of war was: "Britain is great again". She now heads a government which has a new authority in the world, which can act as the cutting edge for world imperialism. She has shown that military power can be used.

This view was ridiculed in the preconference discussions. The majority argued that there was no validity in an overall assessment of the world situation. We were told that the Falkland war was "restricted to the Falkland/Malvinas issue" (IB 18 p.6). We were told that assessments of its effects on the world situation were "amorphous" and invalid.

Supporters of the majority Casey and McVicar in Scotland wrote, claiming to represent the whole membership, a crass insulting and slanted report on my contribution to the Scottish area aggregate - which had taken up all aspects of the Malvinas situation including its world context - in which they said the following about this particular point:

Smith, however, obviously regarded such attention being paid to the question of the invasion as nit-picking which paled into insignificance before his analysis of the "balance of forces" on a world scale. The Scottish comrades were privileged enough to be presented with a majestic display of global speculations about the repercussions of the British victory, ranging from the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon to the Tory offensive against the unions. Despite the grandeur of the occasion, however, the comrades were unimpressed.

Taking up our view that the war had to be seen from the point of view of the actions of imperialism and the implications of the war on a world scale, the majority resolution to the special conference (signed by Carolan etc) said the following:

The Argentine working class should never subordinate its own class struggle to estimates of the "international balance of forces" between the

different bourgeoisies... The assessment according to which British victory was a major blow for imperialism is incomplete. The British bourgeoisie certainly was strengthened by victory politically and in its prestige. But these gains may well prove shallow and temporary (indeed, the continued class struggle has already proved them shallow and temporary), and the British bourgeoisie has gained nothing material - like new military strength, new spheres of influence, or new possessions.

In fact the resolution went on in the next sentence to imply a progressive outcome to the war: "The Argentine regime, on the other hand, has certainly been weakened by the defeat. This result is a blow against imperialism and capitalist control in Latin America." (my emphasis).

We argued at the time against this absolutely fantastic view of the situation. We argued that very far from being a blow against capitalist control in Latin America, it would very seriously increase the hand of imperialism in the region. I remember arguing precisely that revolutionary fighters in El Salvador would not feel strengthened at the moment of Thatcher's victory but would feel very vulnerable indeed. El Salvador stands now absolutely exposed as the most likely next in line for massive US military action.

US imperialism is on the rampage. They now say that their actions in the Lebanon in direct military support of the Falangist forces is action designed to "protect their fundamental interests in the region". If comrades in the present majority in the WSL are unable to see the significance of such a statement it is a very serious situation. If they do but continue to deny the role of the Malvinas war in it, it can only be because they are blinded by their seriously wrong view of the world which informs their positions.

Smith 26-10-83.

N.B. The Grenada invasion also answers the allegation made against us in the Malvinas debate that the call for a special conference was irresponsible since the Falkland war had become a "historical issue" once the fighting ceased.

