

AGAINST NEUTRALITY ON THE FALKLANDS WAR
DEFEND ARGENTINA - NO CONFIDENCE IN GALTIERI

The present position of the movement on the Falklands war was endorsed by a 20-16 vote on the National Committee on Sunday May 17th. This vote overturned a 5-3 majority decision of the Executive Committee a week earlier. The present majority NC position, which determines our attitude to the Falklands war, is one of defeatism on both sides, linked to demands for the withdrawal of Argentine troops from the Falklands and self-determination for the 1500 islanders. The signatories to this document consider these positions to be wrong and damaging to the WSL, the working class and the anti-imperialist masses.

There seems to be a lack of clarity as to what defeatism on both sides means. We have to be absolutely honest and say that it means neutrality in the military conflict between Britain and Argentina. Contrary to the impression which may be given, to call for defeatism in Britain does not imply a call for the victory of the Argentine forces over British forces. This has been clear on the EC and the NC. There has been agreement on the call for the defeat of the British forces but not by the Argentine forces.

Defeatism means the defeat of your own ruling class by the working class. It means "the main enemy is at home". It means "British workers and soldiers turn your guns on your own officers and ruling class", because our own ruling class is an imperialist ruling class. That is a basic Marxist position that we hold in all wars at any time which are being waged by our own ruling class. The question is, what position do we hold for the other side in the war, in this case Argentina? If we hold, as we do, a revolutionary defeatist position for the Argentine working class, then we are saying, "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". In other words, we are neutral in the military conflict between the two state powers, both in the final outcome and in particular battles or clashes. This is often a correct position to hold. We would always hold it in the case of a war between two imperialist powers. It would often be our position in the case of a war between non-imperialist powers - like Iran and Iraq. In the case of a war between a major imperialist power and a non-imperialist power, however, it can be fundamentally wrong. It even questions whether we would favour the defeat of the British forces by the Argentine forces if it happened. At the NC, Comrade Carolan could not decide which would be worst - a British or an Argentine victory!

Such a position of neutrality reflects in part the very different material conditions prevailing at present in Britain as against those facing the Argentine workers. In Britain of course there is no conscription, no danger of air strikes at our mainland, no enemy fleet cruising 12 miles off the coast threatening to attack any ship or aircraft which ventures out of port, and no overt austerity measures.

Conditions in Argentina are very different. The working class cannot escape from the fact that their country is under attack. The whole male population has been conscripted; and there is a foreign, imperialist navy offshore with guns and missiles trained on Argentine targets. The imperialist response to Galtieri's adventure in invading the Malvinas has in turn triggered a wave of anti-imperialist militancy. In the mass mobilisations on the streets can be seen the most advanced, class conscious elements in the Argentine workers' movement, exploiting the opening in the repression to put forward the slogan "Malvinas yes - Galtieri no!"

It is in this context that every major current of Trotskyism, with the exception of the WSL, the Sparts and a handful of (North European)

USFI people, has concluded that the war creates conditions to raise the consciousness of the Argentine working class and develop the struggle against imperialism. The closer we get to Latin America, the more unanimous are political tendencies that a victory for Argentina would create better conditions for the struggle to oust Galtieri and the junta. Yet from England, the WSL majority tells them all that they are wrong.

Indeed, since the majority position suggests - at least implicitly - that the cause of the Argentine workers might be better served by a military victory of British imperialism than by an Argentine victory, it is worth looking a little more closely at this scenario. Would a defeat for Galtieri precipitate a resurgence of workers' militancy in Argentina, a resumption of the mass action which pushed Galtieri into his initial invasion, a produce a heightened confidence among workers of their ability to topple the imperialist-backed junta which has so savagely repressed them?

This might be argued to be the case were it true that the predominant mood among the workers was hostility to the war. But all the signs are that the workers identify with the fight against British imperialism. They would regard a setback in that war as a setback for them. We have no reason to presume at present that under the blows of such a setback the working class - which had not been strong enough previously to topple the junta - will suddenly find renewed strength. Indeed a beaten and isolated Galtieri could even seek ways to utilise such a situation to rally "national unity" in a beleaguered Argentina, and implant the Malvinas diversion as a central obstacle to further moves of the working class.

Outside Argentina the masses of Latin America would witness a ~~bloody setback inflicted upon a whole nation by imperialist armed force~~. We cannot precisely 'quantify' such a blow to the consciousness of the masses: but it would certainly shape the thinking and thus the actions of those in struggle against imperialist control.

To stand for the defence of Argentina in the war does not imply, of course, support for the blood-drenched military junta. It means standing with an oppressed nation against an oppressor. The government of the day in the oppressed nation is an important issue which we have to address ourselves to, but it is secondary to the struggle against imperialism. The very clear position argued by Trotsky on this is well worth repeating for comrades who still may not be familiar with it:

On Brazil:

"In the countries of Latin America the agents of 'democratic' imperialism are especially dangerous, since they are more capable of fooling the masses than the open agents of fascist bandits. I will take the most simple and obvious example. In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally - in this case I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to

British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners and robbers!"
(Writings 38-39, p.34)

On China: When China was faced with invasion from Imperialist Japan, Trotsky had to polemicise against a false position argued by sectarian forces (including some in the Chinese section). Their position was this: Since Chiang Kai-Shek is reactionary, a war fought in defence against the Japanese imperialists under his leadership was therefore also reactionary. In arguing their defeatism, the sectarians said: "The only salvation of the workers and peasants of China is to struggle independently against the two armies". Faced with a situation of a real military conflict between a non-imperialist country against an imperialist invasion, Trotsky defined the sectarian position in this way: "To speak of 'revolutionary defeatism' in general without distinguishing between exploiter and exploited countries, is to make a miserable caricature of Bolshevism . . . If Japan is an imperialist country, and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favour China. Japanese patriotism is the hideous mask of world-wide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive."

Trotsky was not unaware of the reactionary nature of the Chinese regime: "Chiang Kai-Shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan". "(it is) the duty of all workers organisations of China to participate actively and in the front lines . . . without abandoning for a single moment their own program and independent activity . . . To be able to replace him (Chiang) it is necessary to gain decisive influence among the proletariat and in the army, and to do this it is necessary, not to remain suspended in the air, but to place oneself in the midst of the struggle. We must win influence and prestige in the military struggle against the foreign invasion [Trotsky uses the word 'invasion' because he is referring to an invasion, on Brazil he talks about 'military conflict'] and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, the internal betrayal. At a certain point, which we cannot fix in advance, this political opposition can and must be transformed into armed conflict since the civil war, like war generally, is nothing more than the continuation of the political struggle. It is necessary however to know when and how to transform political opposition into armed insurrection . . . To participate actively and consciously in the war does not mean to 'serve Chiang Kai-Shek' but to serve the independence of a colonial country in spite of Chiang Kai-Shek . . . In participating in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-Shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command in the war for independence - to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-Shek . . . that is the only revolutionary policy."

(On China, pp. 567-571)

On Mexico:

"Thus, in a conflict between the oil kings and their executive committee, which is the democratic government of Great Britain, the class conscious proletariat of the world sides wholly with Mexico."

(Writings 38-39, p.64)

On Tunisia:

"We shall not dwell on the fact that in the event of a national war waged by the Bey of Tunis against France, program would be on the side of the barbarian monarch."

(Writings 38-39, p.66)

That very clear quote, where Trotsky is talking about a regime worse than Galtieri, has not been adequately refuted by the comrades on the NC majority. They tackle it in two ways. First, they question whether Argentina is in fact a non-imperialist power, and define it as "sub-imperialist". Secondly, they say that Trotsky's position would only apply in the case of an invasion of the Argentine mainland aimed at the conquest and military suppression of Argentina. (Something which is absolutely inconceivable). But these two positions are contradictory. The first backs up an often-expressed view of the NC majority comrades that Argentina is a middle-ranking capitalist power little different to Britain. The second says that in the event of a war of conquest against Argentina it would be regarded as fundamentally different and Trotsky's view would apply.

The NC majority say that they would support Argentina in a war against imperialism only if national liberation was involved. And national liberation is defined to mean only the struggle to remove, or defend against direct imperialist rule through conquest. What the comrades have done is to define national liberation and war in such a way that they will never be called upon to defend Argentina.

But the facts are that Argentina is subject to national domination by imperialism. National rights are involved - 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. Argentina is a non-imperialist dependent state. And it is at war, in defence against imperialist attack.

The majority comrades argue at great length, and place great store, as to whether we have changed our position or not (although they would be better discussing whether we are right or wrong rather than if we have changed). There have certainly been mistakes since April 2nd by a majority of comrades on both the EC and the OC. The estimations of the war by the majority (not the majority as it now stands) have varied between treating it as a joke to a consistent underestimation of its significance. At the first OC meeting after April 2nd, comrade Carolan argued against discussing the adoption of a position on the task force on the basis that it was "a joke". From then until the first bombing of Port Stanley airstrip, a majority view held that the most likely outcome would be military intimidation to back up diplomatic moves limiting military action to "skirmishes". Pressure for this came from the OC comrades who now form the NC majority, and was undoubtedly influenced by a desire to mould events to fit their view that British imperialism hardly exists and is certainly no longer a significant force in the world.

A third strand of argument, recurrent in comrade Carolan's document, is to brand the anti-imperialist mobilisation of workers in Argentina - or even Latin America as a whole - as no more than "chauvinism". Those who call for defence of Argentina are likened to the social patriotic traitors of 1914. This position yet again obliterates any distinction between the status of imperialist Britain and dependent, non-imperialist Argentina. And it ignores the very real contradictions within the mobilisation of the masses that has followed the escalation of the war. The hundreds of thousands of workers on the streets are denounced in one lump as "chauvinists" - thus dismissing any prospect of developing the anti-imperialist dynamic of this movement in the direction of the overthrow of the nearest element of imperialist control - the junta itself. To make theoretical calls of the majority comrades for the arming of the workers, expropriation of imperialist holdings and overthrow of Galtieri a reality, it is necessary to find a point of connection with the most advanced workers. That connection is plain only from the standpoint of defending Argentina against imperialism - combined with the exposure and political struggle against