

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONALIST POSITION ON THE MALVINAS WAR.

There are a number of points that need to be clarified, which have arisen during the Malvinas/Falklands debate. Basically they fall around the question of Permanent Revolution, the National Question, Bonapartism/semi bonapartism and underlying all this the method of dialectical materialism.

The term Permanent Revolution was first developed by Karl Marx during the Revolutions of 1848, when it became clear to him that the Bourgeoisie could not carry through the bourgeois revolution, because the revolution, to be successful required the people to be mobilised, and the working class in the cities now constituted the major part of the people. In explaining the defeats of 1848, Marx summed up that "... the reason for all these defeats is that every uprising that now takes place is a direct threat to the political existence of the bourgeoisie and an indirect threat to its social existence." (Marx Uprising in Frankfurt Collected Works Vol7 p.444).

Marx later expanded on the underlying reason for this which is that the development of the proletariat and the need to mobilise the proletariat, to carry through the social revolution, would mean that the revolution would not cease at the bourgeois stage. Marx put the problem facing the bourgeoisie, neatly, when he wrote that the workers having carried through the bourgeois revolution would not stop there but shift their rifles from their right shoulder to their left and then deal with the bourgeoisie and carry through the proletarian revolution as the logical conclusion.

Trotsky and Parvus expanded upon Marx's initial observations of 1848. Trotsky pointed out in "Results and Prospects" written in 1904, that the successful establishment of bourgeois class rule in the industrial heartlands of the world (Europe, U.S.A. etc) and the development of Capitalism as a world system, meant that in countries such as Russia, Capitalism created large concentrations of workers in the cities (in some of the largest factories of the time) prior to the bourgeois revolution in that country. Moreover, unlike the situation in 1848, when the proletariat "rushed into battle urged on only by a hazy class instinct", the proletariat in Russia had a developed class consciousness. This was partly because Capitalism, employing new methods, was concentrating more workers in larger factories, but also because the labour movement in Russia was able to draw on the experiences of the older labour movement in Europe.

Trotsky summed up his work 'Permanent Revolution' with a very specific set of theses relevant to situations in semi colonial countries, where the peasantry play a significant role in the struggle. The central question of how the proletariat relates to the peasantry, so as to establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry is of course the Land Question, and since this is an integral part of the bourgeois revolution, it must obviously be dealt with by the proletariat during the permanent revolution when it occurs. It is not of itself an integral part of the theory as some comrades mistakenly seem to think.

The central material base of the theory is that the bourgeoisie cannot carry out its historic tasks, because to do so would be to mobilise the proletariat, and then the bourgeoisie is faced with a situation where if it successfully carried out its historic tasks, the forces unleashed to do that would overthrow the bourgeoisie themselves, that force being the proletariat.

It was exactly this situation which led Rosa Luxemburg to make the correct assessment that in Poland the only force capable of carrying through the national liberation of Poland was the proletariat, and that that struggle could only be successful if the proletariat took power. The S.D.K.P.i.L. (Luxemburg's party which affiliated to the Bolsheviks) went on to correctly assess that the overthrowal of Tsarist oppression would only be possible through the joint struggle of the Polish and Russian working classes. The

success they had in winning the Polish working class away from the petty bourgeois leadership of the P.P.S. in 1905 again shows the correctness of their position as against the petty bourgeois nationalists of the PPS who had elevated self determination to a principle, only to find that the Polish bourgeoisie were uninterested in Polish nationalism for the very reasons that Luxemburg and her comrades had deduced.

What was common in all three of the theorists' understanding of these problems, was that given a situation with a developed proletariat and where the bourgeoisie has not carried out its historical tasks, then those tasks fall on the proletariat as part of its social revolution, because the bourgeoisie would not risk mobilising the proletariat, its own "grave digger", to fulfill those tasks.

So how does this all tie in with the questions raised by the Malvinas/Falklands war?

The relevance of Permanent Revolution to the debate depends on our understanding of the nature of the Argentinian class rule. It is obviously bourgeois class rule, but it is not the classical form of bourgeois class rule which is the democratic republic. It is a military junta and as such an expression of an unstable form of class rule which as Marxists we would describe as either bonapartist or semi bonapartist. The Galtiera Junta is best described as semi bonapartist at the start of the war since its role was that of the arbitrator between the interests of the Argentinian bourgeoisie and Imperialism and at the same time combining the common interests of both sections of Capital, in attempting to destroy all independent organisations of the working class.

However, during the Malvinas war, the Galtiera Junta was forced into conflict with imperialism, and in order to continue the war, had to turn for support to the Argentinian working class. In the process of which it was forced to stop persecuting the organisations of the working class and to allow them an element of freedom, and the longer the war continued, the greater the break with imperialism and the weaker the position of the Junta, so representing a major opening for the working class.

The next question must surely be how did a semi bonapartist regime get into such a position? Since the underlying thread behind the concept of Permanent Revolution is that the bourgeoisie do not risk carrying out their historic tasks if it means that the proletariat may be able to overthrow them.

The decision to invade the Malvinas was based on two things. Firstly, the need to detract from the crisis facing the country and in particular defusing the General Strike called for Monday 5th April, it was probably that which determined the actual time of the invasion. Secondly, it has become clear that the U.S.A. wanted to establish a military base on the Malvinas which would obviously act as a safe bastion of reaction against any revolutionary uprising in Latin America.

The decision was taken for very reactionary reasons, and in no way in the interest of the Argentinian working class!

What happened next was that the Argentinian working class greeted the invasion favourably, seeing it in terms of destroying a last vestige of the British Empire and reclaiming part of Argentina. The General Strike went out the window.

In other words the Junta successfully won the first round. It had achieved what it set out to do.

But, and this is where the so called "Majority" go wrong, the Argentine Junta and American Imperialism had not taken into account the fact that the British Bourgeoisie, faced with their own domestic crisis, and entering a prolonged struggle with the N.H.S. workers, would respond by sending the majority of the British Fleet to retake the Malvinas.

In other words, the internal contradiction of the invasion as carried out by the Argentinians was that it was carried out by the Junta for anti-proletarian reasons and supported by US Imperialism, but at the same time it had an anti-imperialist dynamic which was supported by the working class, expressed on demonstrations in the slogan "Malvinas Yes! Galtiera No!".

Since it was the Junta who first initiated the struggle, it is obvious that the reactionary dynamic would dominate in the opening stages of the war. However as soon as British Imperialism retaliated, by sending the Task force, the war took on a completely new dimension. US Imperialism correctly assessed that a conflict with British Imperialism was out the question, since the central task of Imperialism as a whole is the recapture of the markets of Eastern Europe. However neither did it want to have a conflict between Argentina and Britain, since the Argentinian Junta was one of the most pro US forces in Latin America. US Imperialism was therefore forced into a position of arbitrator, but once it became clear that British Imperialism was set on a military victory and therefore also the possibility of military defeat US Imperialism had to side with Britain to maintain the unity of Imperialism as a force against the Liberation and Socialist struggles and also the Stalinist states.

But by lining up with British Imperialism, the U.S.A. forced the Junta into a situation of having to rely more and more on the Argentinian working class, who had rallied to the anti imperialist dynamic of the war. In such a situation the Galtiera Junta was becoming more and more unstable. The conflict against imperialism could only be successful if it included acting against imperialist interests in Argentina as well as the military struggle. To do that would have been to end the Junta, since it relies imperialism as one of its main bases of support, even if in the short term it were replaced by a Left-Peronist / Bonapartist government. But even so such a struggle would pose the question of which class can form a coherent government, and only that class which has no ties of loyalty to imperialism, can, i.e. the working class.

The relation of the theory of Permanent Revolution in relation to the Malvinas war, is therefore that since the bourgeoisie in Argentina, could not successfully carry through the war against imperialism, because it relied on imperialism to maintain its own class rule, and having entered into this situation, was forced to either loose the war or to turn to the Argentinian proletariat for support. The proletariat in that instance would support the bourgeoisie "like a rope supports a hanging man". To win the war would necessarily have led to the overthrow of the Junta, since the struggle would mean the defeat of imperialist interests in Argentina, as well as in the Malvinas, and the only class that could do that is the proletariat.

Some Comrades have argued that the Argentinian working class supported the war for chauvinist reasons. A couple of observations should undermine this argument. Firstly, a chauvinistic rallying to the "National Interest" on the part of the working class is something that Marxists in Western Europe have ample examples to study, but in all cases the working class gives up its political independence, and tow the bourgeois class line. For example the ban on strikes agreed by the British Labour Movement during the 2nd World War. Secondly in Argentina, the working class may have conceded the General Strike call in the initial stages, but it was the Bourgeoisie who were forced to concede greater freedom ("Truth is the first casualty of war"?) to the labour movement and to allow even revolutionary groups to distribute their propaganda, something which is the total opposite in cases where the class rallies to the bourgeoisie.

What about self-determination for the Falkland Islanders?

The so called "Majority" have probably committed their greatest theoretical error over the question of Self-determination, by treating it as a universal principle. Cde Carolan and Kinnel of course are exempt since they do not

call for self-determination for the Palestinian people. However, for the other comrades who support the so called "Majority", it is important to show that the question has never been a universal principle of the Communist Movement and secondly when and when not to pose the demand.

Cde Lenin in the Theses for the 2nd Congress of the Communist International on the National and Colonial questions, makes a number of very relevant points for the present debate.

"... the Communist Party ... must base its policy in the national question too not on abstract and formal principles, but first on a precise appraisal of the specific historical situation and primarily of economic conditions; second on a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes of working and exploited people and the general concept of national interest as a whole which implies the interests of the ruling class; third, on an equally clear distinction between oppressed dependent nations and the oppressing exploiting and sovereign nations in order to counter the bourgeois-democratic lies that play down this colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by an insignificant minority of the richest and advanced capitalist countries, a feature characteristic of the era of finance capital and imperialism." (Lenin. Selected Works Vol 3 p337)

If this is taken as the basis for the discussion, it is obvious that self-determination is only applicable in cases where a nation is oppressed by Imperialism. It is not the case that we are in favour of the right of Zionists to self-determination, or the White South Africans or the Northern Irish Protestants. For the simple reasons that on the specific historical situation, they represent imperialism, and their interests are not the interests of the oppressed class and they sit above the oppressed dependent and subject nations; the Nationalist Community in the 6 Counties; the Palestinians, both in and out of Israel; and the Blacks of South Africa.

So how does this relate to the Malvinas? There is no native population exploited by the Falkland Islanders, but they in turn were threatened with oppression, by being forced under Argentinian rule and therefore had the right to self determination, expressed by wanting to stay British.

But would we support the Zionists' right to Israel if they successfully drove out the last of the Palestinians? Would we accept the White South Africans right if they made the Cape a Whites Only area? Would we accept the right of the Northern Irish Protestants to the Orange Statelet if they bused all the Nationalist Community into the South?

In other words, if the settler community, which represents by its presence, imperialism, is to act more harshly than it has so far done in these situations would we then support it, and say that they had a right to self determination? Of course not !

The Falkland Islands, while they remain part of the British Empire, are by their very presence, oppressive. It does not however make Galtiera a great national liberator, as was spelt out above, nor does it negate the reactionary reasons behind the invasion, and the fact that the invasion was reactionary, but it still had a progressive dynamic to it, and after the sending of the British Task Force, and the related altering of the nature of the struggle, it was and is the duty of all Internationalists to support the anti-imperialist dynamic of the struggle, that means defending Argentina.

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