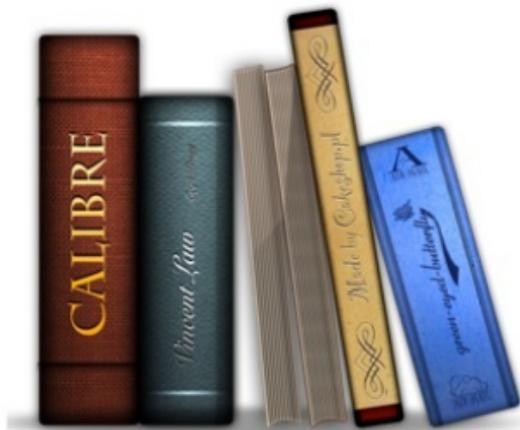


# Working-class politics and the scheme of imperialist and anti-imperialist "camps": lessons from the Falklands/ Malvinas war of 1982

Sean Matgamna and others



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# **Chapter 1: Introduction to dossier on the Falklands/ Malvinas, from Workers' Liberty 2/3**

The Falkland Islands, small specks in the South Atlantic, were annexed by Britain and settled by British people in the 1830s. There had been no previous indigenous population. A century and a half later, in the 1970s and 80s, the islands were an odd little relic of empire. They had no huge economic or strategic importance. Their 1800 or so inhabitants, many of whom would move on to more clement climates after their time in the Falklands, had no desire to

separate from Britain.

Argentina had long laid claim to the islands - calling them the Malvinas - on the grounds that it was the nearest landmass. It was not very near - 400 miles to the islands from the closest point on Argentina's coast, 2000 miles from Argentina's main population centres. The British population on the islands was longer-settled than the core of the Argentine nation, also European settlers, mostly from Spain and Italy.

The British government found the islands more a nuisance than an asset, and talked with the Argentine government about schemes to link them with Argentina while keeping some special

rights.

In early 1982, however, Argentina's military dictators faced mounting popular revolt. They wanted a diversion to regain the initiative. They sent troops to seize the islands on 1-2 April. They hoped that Britain, which had long since abandoned any attempt to be a world military power, would lack motivation and resources to resist.

The British government of Margaret Thatcher did, however, counter-attack; re-took the islands after a short war (25 April to 14 June); and made itself a nice little political coup from the affair. Argentina's military dictator Leopoldo Galtieri resigned three days after the

end of the war. His military successor, Reynaldo Bignone, organised elections which brought back civilian government from October 1983. The civilian government brought Galtieri to court for his crimes.

Socialist Organiser, forerunner of Workers' Liberty, opposed Britain's war, but denounced the Argentine military's side of the war too. The Falkland islanders had the right to self-determination. Most would-be revolutionary socialists, however, thought differently. They saw the conflict as one between "imperialism" (Britain) and "anti-imperialism" or at any rate "non-imperialism" (Argentina), and felt duty-bound to take the "anti-imperialist" side.

Inside our organisation at the time, this view was put by a section led by Alan Thornett, who now adheres to the International Socialist Group and the monthly paper Resistance.

The first text below is a resolution (written by Martin Thomas and Sean Matgamna) which summarised the views of our wing of the organisation. The "tendency" referred to in it was a subsection of the Thornett wing which provided that wing with its theoretical justifications. The framework of our position is still the "Leninist defeatism" whose historical provenance is an artefact of the Stalinisers of the mid-1920s Communist International, and

whose malign work Hal Draper analysed in WL 2/1. The merit of the resolution which marked a crossroads in the development of the Workers' Liberty tendency, is that it tries to be concrete in its analysis and does not "read off" conclusions from the "epochal position". The second text is an article written (for Workers' Socialist Review no.2) to argue for concrete analysis and argue against dogmatic text-worship, specifically using passages from Leon Trotsky's writings of the 1930s as mandates for the pro-Argentine position. At the time, despite our fervent opposition to the Russian military occupation of Afghanistan and to martial law in Poland (1981), we still held, at least nominally, to the view that the Stalinist states were "degenerated

and deformed workers' states". We would formally abandon that in 1987, but the old view appears in these texts.

Freakish in its origins, at the time the Falklands war appeared to be an episode unlikely to have sequels. Hindsight tells a different story. It posed issues which would be posed again in a number of other wars. Over Kuwait (1991), Kosova (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and maybe Iraq (2003), wars would be waged by the Western big powers - the "main enemies at home", to use Karl Liebknecht's phrase from World War 1, for European and North American socialists - but also ostensibly, and in part really, for aims we supported. As we supported the Falkland Islanders'

freedom, but opposed the British state fighting for that in its own way and with its own concerns in mind, so also we would support the expulsion of conquerors from Kuwait, the preservation of the Kosovars' national existence, the ejection of the Taliban, and the ousting of Saddam Hussein, but remain politically hostile to the US-led forces fighting those wars. The 1982 debate thus has an importance beyond its immediate circumstances.

Alan Gilbert



# **Class politics versus bloc politics: resolution for the Workers' Socialist League (WSL, a forerunner of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty), 1982, later sections reworked in 1984**

## **1. Marxism and war**

A Marxist attitude to a war must start from an assessment of which classes are waging the war and for what objectives. On the basis of that assessment we determine our line not as supervisors of the historic process

but as militant advocates of class struggle.

Where a war, even under bourgeois leadership, is about an issue like self-determination for an oppressed nation - an issue which is a necessary part of the liberation struggle of the working class - the working class should support the war while maintaining complete independence and fighting to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Where a war between bourgeoisies has no progressive content on either side, we must fight for the defeat of both sides - i.e., against the war and for the defeat of both bourgeoisies by working class action.

In all cases we fight for working class fraternisation. We do not casually disrupt the international unity of the working class, setting one national section to slaughter another out of deference to the right of the bourgeoisie to rule as it likes. Where a war has a progressive content, we fight for working class unity on the basis of support for the progressive demands of the progressive side.

As the 1920 Theses of the Comintern on the National and Colonial Question, a basic document of our movement, put it: "...the entire policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based primarily on bringing together the proletariat and

working classes of all nations and countries for the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landowners and the bourgeoisie. For only such united action will ensure victory over capitalism, without which it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality of rights."

## 2. Our enemy is at home

Britain's war over the Falklands/Malvinas was designed only to preserve a relic of empire and shore up the prestige of British imperialism. A defeatist stand towards Britain's war was therefore the no. 1 campaigning priority for Marxists in

Britain.

Instead of assisting the Tories in their crisis by "patriotic" support for the government, the British labour movement should have used the crisis to hasten Thatcher's overthrow in the interests of the working class, and given all material and political support to the Argentine workers in the struggle for democratic and trade union rights and for the establishment of a genuine anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina.

We repudiate any legitimacy of British territorial claims in the Falklands or any legitimacy in related British claims to resources in Antarctica.

### 3. Argentina's war aims

But the pretext on which the Argentine junta embarked upon the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas was equally contrived. In taking its action, the junta acted not against imperialism, but in a populist ploy designed to divert and unite the Argentine masses behind the Generals' own repressive rule.

In doing so the Argentine dictators 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. Such action did nothing to build anti-

imperialist consciousness in the Argentine working class, but rather sought to generate chauvinism and "national unity". We did not support this action, and called for the withdrawal of Argentine troops.

In its seizure of the Falklands/Malvinas, designed to boost its position at home and in the region, the Argentine regime miscalculated about the British reaction, and the US response to the British reaction.

This miscalculation could not however make the seizure, or the war to maintain the seizure, progressive.

Galtieri's invasion did not liberate

anyone from colonialism or imperialism. It did not lessen the burden of imperialist exploitation, or improve the conditions for the fight against it, for a single Argentine worker.

It embroiled the Argentine people in a war in which they could hope to win nothing of significance, a disastrous war in a false and reactionary cause.

#### 4. Reactionary on both sides

On both sides therefore the war was reactionary. The job of Marxists in both Britain and Argentina was to oppose the war, to counterpose international

working-class unity, to continue the class struggle for the overthrow of both the Tories and the military regime.

## 5. Self-determination for Falklanders

Support for the right of the Falkland Islanders - a distinct historical, ethnic, linguistic, economic and geographic community 400 miles from Argentina - to determine their own future is axiomatic for Leninists in the given conditions, where that community exploited no other community, threatened no other community, and was not used as, or likely to be used as, a base for imperialist control of another community.

The Falklanders' right to self-determination cannot be invalidated by their desire to adhere to the now-imperialist state that spawned the Falklands community. That desire to adhere to Britain would invalidate their right to self-determination only if adherence had direct imperialist/colonialist consequences for Argentina or some other country, whose right to resist those consequences would (because of their size, etc.) outweigh the rights of the islanders. Only then would the "pro-imperialist" views of the islanders lead to them playing an imperialist role. Nothing like that was actually involved. The agency for imperialist domination in Argentina is the

Argentine state, not the islands or any base on the islands.

To use a definition of the islanders as "pro-imperialist" against their right to self-determination is to introduce inappropriate political categories and criteria, different from those which properly apply. The Falkland Islanders are British. That is what determines their attitudes, not any pro-imperialist views they may have. The WSL is not in favour of the subjugation of a population because it has such views, or because of their origins. The ethnic tidying-up of the globe is no part of the international socialist revolution.

Support for the Falklanders' rights plainly

does not necessarily mean support for military action to enforce those rights. In the actual situation, with Britain an imperialist power, we rejected and opposed the British military action. We look to the international working class, and especially the Argentine labour movement, to secure the Falklanders' rights.

Such a consistent democratic policy is the only basis for international working class unity, and specifically for the unity of the British and Argentine working class (which had to be our central concern) in this dispute.

## 6. "Against Britain" does not mean "for Argentina"

The WSL conducted itself as an internationalist and revolutionary proletarian organisation during the British/Argentine war. We raised a variant of the famous slogan of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, "The enemy is at home", and called on the working class to actively hinder the British ruling class's prosecution of the war by industrial action. We conducted internationalist working class propaganda against the social-chauvinist Labour leaders, while attempting to maintain a dialogue with the pacifistic Labour Left (that is, with those in the working class who listen to

the Left leaders) on the question.

It is no necessary part of proletarian internationalist opposition to the war of an imperialist government to side with their opponents. Our response to the fact that it was for the British ruling class a war for authority and prestige was our defeatism; positive support for Argentina could, for communists, only be grounded in positive working-class reasons for such support.

Marxists reject the primitive rebels' approach that puts a plus everywhere that the bourgeoisie puts a minus. We must judge events from an independent working class viewpoint.

We side with our ruling-class enemies in particular conflicts if the struggle serves our politics - e.g. in a national liberation struggle, even under the leadership of a Chiang Kai-Shek.

But in no way could the policy of the Argentine proletariat be deduced as a mere negative imprint of the policy of the British bourgeoisie.

The tendency justifies the pro-Argentine position with the view that "a victory [for Argentina] would quite likely mean the downfall of Thatcher... [And] the British have a far more important international role [than Argentina] as a primary carrier and protector of imperialism. This means that the nature of the British

regime is a question of immediate international importance..." (second tendency document, p. 16); conversely, "[Argentine] withdrawal... would result in another Tory government with a massive majority... it would be an event of world significance..." (first tendency document, Workers' Socialist Review 2 p.29).

The idea here that Argentine workers' policy should be decided by what is worst for the British bourgeoisie - that the British revolution has priority, and the Argentine revolution should be subordinated to it - is British nationalist and utterly to be rejected as a basis for determining proletarian politics in Argentina.

## 7. Argentina is not a semi-colony

Argentina is far more developed than most non-imperialist countries; it is a fully bourgeois state; and it possesses political independence. It also occupies a subordinate rank within the imperialist world economy. This subordination, however, in no way gives any progressive character to the Argentine bourgeoisie.

The Argentine bourgeoisie is not a progressive force, but the major agency for imperialist domination of the Argentine working class and an assistant for imperialist domination

throughout Latin America. It has moreover its own predatory ambitions. For the Argentine working class it is "the main enemy at home". Quite apart from its foreign connections, it is the class that directly exploits them.

We reject as un-Marxist assessments of Argentina's situation such as this:

Argentina is economically, militarily and politically dominated by imperialism - not by its own national bourgeoisie - but in particular by US interests. The whole basis of its economy is subject to the international market over which Argentina has no influence, let alone control and dominance" (second tendency document, page 2).

We reject the counterposition of the Argentine bourgeoisie to imperialism, and the measuring of Argentina's situation by comparison with a situation where the country would escape the international market (which in a capitalist world it can never do).

Every country is more or less dominated by the world economy. No country has control over it - now not even the US colossus which was supreme after World War Two. This situation cannot be changed by war between the weaker bourgeoisies and the stronger. Not such wars, but the international workers' revolution, can change it.

The communist answer to colonial, semi-colonial and military domination is national liberation struggle; to the domination of the weaker by the strong in the world market (as to the domination of the weak by the strong, and the pauperisation of particular regions, within capitalist nations) our answer is the proletarian revolution.

We reject the notion of an anti-imperialist united front for Argentina (a version of the bloc of classes central to Menshevism and then Stalinism, motivated on the grounds that the Argentine bourgeoisie is an oppressed class in relation to imperialism). We reject the notion that the Argentine bourgeoisie can play any progressive

role either within Argentina, where it is our mortal class enemy, or against imperialism, into which it is completely integrated.

[Sections 8 and 9 omitted; section 10 abridged].

## 10. The theory of "enclaves"

... Today, imperialism operates overwhelmingly through economic mechanisms (backed up, of course, sometimes, by military intervention). Residual mini-colonies like the Falklands - and various other tiny British, French and Spanish colonies - have no

strategic role for imperialism. They are essentially anachronistic loose ends of the period of European settler expansion over the globe.

## 11. Natural resources

There is no sense in which the conflict had an economic anti-imperialist dimension. British property in Argentina, not to speak of the property of other imperialist powers, was left alone during the war. The Argentine state did not even propose to take the Falkland Islands Company from Coalite.

Better Argentine claims on Antarctica

from the Falklands would most likely have led to US exploitation of the Antarctic, with Argentina as a conduit. That is the concrete meaning of the subordinate position of Argentina vis--vis the US and imperialism.

Conversely, one of the major reasons why Britain had been trying to give the Falklands to Argentina is that a stable political settlement is a precondition for the viability of the big investments necessary for the capitalist exploitation of the area's resources.

The exploitation would have to be joint exploitation, on one set of terms or another. The war was not about whether the resources should belong to

imperialism or not.

The Argentine bourgeoisie is not counterposed to imperialism. And imperialism cannot be identified solely with Britain (conversely, anti-imperialism cannot necessarily be identified with an anti-British stance). The British-Argentine war was a war within the network of imperialism and its clients.

The Argentine regime went to war, not for anti-imperialist reasons, but to strengthen its political position at home. They did not wait to win the Falklands by negotiation because of their domestic crisis. And thus they aborted the process of reaching agreement with Britain.

## 12. "World balance of forces"

The Argentine working class should never subordinate its own class struggle to estimates of the "international balance of forces" between different bourgeoisies. The view that "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" (second tendency document, p.7), is anti-Marxist.

The assessment according to which British victory was a major blow for imperialism is incomplete. The British

bourgeoisie certainly was strengthened politically and in its prestige by victory. 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.

The Argentine regime, on the other hand, has certainly been weakened by defeat. The result is a blow against imperialist and capitalist control in Latin America.

Workers in each country can act as internationalists only by fighting their own bourgeoisies, not by acting as makeweights for international bloc

politics. For Argentine socialists to support their rulers' predatory war on the basis of the estimate that the British bourgeoisie's predatory war was worse, would violate that principle.

### 13. Class politics vs. bloc politics

We emphatically reject the notion that the socialist working class can orientate in world politics, and particularly in relation to conflicts among politically independent capitalist states like Britain and Argentina, by constructing a view of the world in terms of two camps, modelled on the division of the world between the degenerated and deformed

workers' states and the capitalist states: "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..." (second tendency document, p.4).

Between the USSR and similar states, and the capitalist states, there is a basic historical class distinction, despite the savage anti working class rule of the totalitarian-bureaucratic elites. No such gap exists between capitalist states.

The bourgeois foreign policy of the rulers of Argentina, even when it is expressed in acts of war, can in no sense change their class camp. Even

should the bourgeoisie of such a state be in alliance with a healthy workers' state, the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie would be the central task of the proletariat in the capitalist state - a task never to be subordinated to international diplomatic, military, or balance-of-forces considerations.

This was a central teaching of the Communist International, and it was not formally repudiated even by the Stalinists until 1935. Thereafter the notion that bourgeois forces which allied with the USSR thereby crossed the historic class divide and joined the camp of progress was the ideological basis of Stalinism to legitimise policies of class betrayal and popular frontism.

We reject as un-Marxist, and brand as "international popular frontism", the view that the Argentine bourgeoisie and their state became part of the "class camp" of the international working class because of their conflict with Britain or during their war with Britain for possession of the Falkland Islands.

#### 14. The regime and imperialism

We reject the notion (implicit in point 7 of the September 1982 resolution [from the Thornett grouping] and explicit elsewhere) that military dictatorships in the Third World are simply the creatures

of imperialism: they are strengthened when imperialism is strengthened, weakened when imperialism is weakened.

Military dictatorships are as common in Third World countries which are relatively alienated from the big capitalist powers - Libya, Algeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Syria, etc. - as in those closely linked to the big capitalist powers (Chile, El Salvador, Nigeria, etc.).

The political regime is fundamentally a product of internal class relations. Frequently, of course, imperialist powers do intervene to prop up or install dictatorships when that suits their purpose. But dictatorial regimes in the

Third World are quite capable of pursuing policies hostile to the big capitalist powers without thereby becoming progressive or unleashing a progressive "process". Iran is a clear example.

## 15. The politics of wishful thinking

Support for Argentina's chauvinist war could not be justified on the basis that it could be the first stage in a development towards militant anti-imperialist struggle. Nor could the war be defined as anti-imperialist by reading an assessment backwards from the scenario of a hoped-for anti-imperialist development.

The scenarios lack the first link: a real national liberation content to the war. A Marxist policy must be based on the realities of the actual war, not on hypothetical speculations or wishful thinking about strategic outcomes.

Argentine workers had no interest in the armed occupation of the Falklands against the wishes of the population; they should have pursued the class struggle regardless of the effects of such struggle on their rulers' ability to maintain the occupation; and it was none of their concern to protect the Argentine bourgeois state against the humiliation it would suffer from being unable to maintain the occupation. These points

should have been the basis of Marxist policy in Argentina.

The tactical ways of expressing this principled position could of course be very flexible (following the method according to which Trotskyists developed the "proletarian military policy" as a tactical expression of the defeatist policy in World War Two).

It would be the job of Marxists in Argentina to seek to develop the genuine anti-imperialist elements in the confused nationalist reaction of Argentine workers, with demands such as arming of the workers, expropriation of imperialist property and seizure of the factories. While making their own views

on the war clear, they should have sought to develop common class actions with workers who confusedly saw Argentina's war as "anti-imperialist" but wanted to go further in anti-imperialism.

## 16. A change of line?

A change in our fundamental attitude to the war could only be justified by a change in the fundamental political content of the war - i.e., so that it was no longer a war restricted to the Falklands/Malvinas issue. If Britain's objectives had shifted so that the war became fundamentally one about an attempt by Britain to make Argentina a

colony or a semi-colony, then Marxists should have sided with Argentina's national independence. But that did not happen. It was always very unlikely that it would happen.

## 17. Trotskyism and the war

The great majority of would-be Trotskyists world-wide took an Argentine nationalist position on the conflict.

The Morenists - the biggest would-be Trotskyist organisation in Argentina itself - called for national unity in the war, and demanded that the trade unions set up recruiting offices for Galtieri's army.

They themselves summarise their position as follows: "To beat imperialism, let us strike in a united way. The war must be won. The socialists, who at no moment have hidden and will not hide their irreducible opposition to the military and bosses' regime, are the fervent advocates of the participation in the framework of this national anti-imperialist mobilisation of all sectors, in or out of uniform, workers or bosses, on only one condition: that they should be to defeat the aggressor and to mobilise the people for that end. That is why the socialists call on the CGT, the CNT (the unions), the Multipartidaria (the bourgeois opposition), all political parties and all sectors who are in

agreement to resolutely confront the aggressors, to push forward all the mobilisations and actions possible so that the Argentine people can strike with one fist and smash the aggressor." (From their pamphlet, *Malouines, les révolutionnaires et la guerre*, p. 9. See the same source for the demand for army recruiting offices.)

Politica Obrera - the second would-be Trotskyist organisation in Argentina - was more restrained, but also supported the mini-colonial war and called for an "anti-imperialist united front" (supposed to include workers and the middle class, but not the big bourgeoisie).

The SWP-USA applauded the speech

of Argentine foreign minister Costa Mendes to the Non-Aligned Conference, and reprinted it.

The Mandel and Lambertist currents were more circumspect (the French and West German Mandelite organisations indeed initially took an internationalist position), but still sided with Galtieri's war. The whole USFI press, both SWP-USA and Mandelite, carried an article on Argentina's relation with imperialism which reproduced the crudest notions of middle-class nationalist "Third Worldism" ("Argentina - a semi-colonial economy", by Will Reissner, Intercontinental Press, 3 May 1982).

A similar position to that we took during

the war was taken - for varying reasons - only by some groups separate from the Trotskyist mainstream: Lutte Ouvriere, the SWP (Britain) and the RWP Sri Lanka; and by the non-Trotskyist, but important, Workers' Party of Brazil.

This experience sheds further light on the politically degenerate condition of would-be Trotskyism, and the need for ideological regeneration.

The roots of the problem go back to the political crisis which shook the Trotskyist movement in the late 1940s.

In that period the Trotskyist movement declined drastically. (The French section, for example, which was central, suffered

an almost complete halt in activity in summer 1948, and by 1952 was only 150 strong, probably less than one-tenth of its peak numbers.) At the same time, gigantic revolutionary events unfolded on a world scale.

Striving to understand this, the leaders of the movement essentially lost faith in the centrality of Trotskyism and the working class to revolutionary politics. In the aftermath of Tito's surprise "break" with Stalin and populist measures designed to rally mass support against any Kremlin moves to oppose him, and in the midst of the drive to power by Mao's Stalinist forces in China, Pablo and the Fourth International leaders increasingly looked to some "objective

process" which would repeat such political developments and take them further.

The outbreak of the Korean war and the conviction that World War Three was imminent lent fuel to their fire, and the schema of the "War-Revolution" which would automatically line up the forces of Stalinism in the "camp" of the revolution made its appearance.

The independent role of the working class and Trotskyists was submerged in a conception of global "class camps" in which the Stalinist bureaucracy, petty bourgeois leaders and sections of reformism were included in the "proletarian" class camp, in which the

Trotskyists merely became respectful advisers and camp followers.

Some Trotskyists took on the role of blustering denouncers of the "bad leaders" of the "Revolution" instead of advisers. But their view of the camps and the issues remained the same.

The two sides of tailist "objectivism" and sectarian arbitrariness into which Trotskyism was thus decomposed were present, in various combinations, in all the currents after 1948-50.

For all the "mainstream" currents, world politics is fundamentally not so much a story of class struggle as a story of the struggle of two forces - Imperialism and

"Revolution" - deemed to operate behind and beneath class movements. While Marxists seek to analyse events as interactions of class forces, they analyse them fundamentally as interactions of Imperialism and "Revolution". Imperialism, for them, is not a system, but a homogeneous force; "Revolution" is not an event, but a continuous process.

They are, of course, concerned for working class action. They see such action as a desirable feature of the Revolution, even an essential feature for the process to be fully healthy. But for them the (same) revolutionary process goes on, working class action or no working class action. The difference

between revolutions is not a class difference, but a difference between more or less healthy and developed manifestations of the same process.

This framework is common to them all: it was common, for example, to those who applauded the Vietnamese Communist Party as good leaders of the Revolution and those who denounced the Vietnamese Communist Party as trying to sell out to US imperialism. Because of their common view of the camps and the issues, none of them could conceive that the VCP was making a revolution, but not our revolution.

There is here a mistaken view of the Stalinist states and the Stalinist-led

revolutions, and of the relation of the Stalinist camp to imperialism and to the workers' revolution. The notion that embraced Galtieri as in our "class camp" was an extrapolation from a campist attitude to the Stalinist bloc - an attitude completely alien to Trotskyism, and which appears within would-be Trotskyism as a direct reflection of the pressure of Stalinism on the weak and mainly petty-bourgeois would-be Trotskyist movement.

Central to the problems of post-war Trotskyism is the refusal to register in any stable way the fact - attested to by repeated experience in China, Vietnam, etc. - that Stalinist forces can be both revolutionary against capitalism and

simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class. Stalinism is always counter-revolutionary against the working class, including in the process in which capitalism is overthrown to be replaced not by workers' power but by bureaucratic dictatorship on the basis of collectivised property and the repression of the working class.

The campists operate with a concept of revolution in which such key facts as the bureaucratic counter-revolution within every Stalinist-led, anti-capitalist revolution are ignored, treated as mere details, or denied. The "Revolution" they embrace is nameless and classless, defined negatively by what it is against more than positively by what it is.

This framework led most of the would-be Trotskyists to see the South Atlantic war as a conflict - however refracted and distorted - between Imperialism and "Revolution". Since Galtieri was fighting British imperialism, and since Imperialism was seen as one homogeneous force, therefore Galtieri's war was against Imperialism, and must be a distorted, underdeveloped form of Revolution - even if Galtieri was a bad, sell-out leader of the Revolution.

Thus the concrete class forces were obscured and most of the would-be Trotskyists tied themselves to a crude "Third Worldist" view of imperialism and anti-imperialism. This view increasingly

obscures reality given the increasing differentiation in the Third World, with the emergence there of major industrial powers, capital-exporters and regional big powers, and the increasing friction between the big imperialist powers.



# **Chapter 3: The texts and the method, by Sean Matgamna. Workers' Socialist Review no.2, 1982**

Time and again the same quotations from Trotsky have been used to justify a pro-Argentine stance in the Falklands/Malvinas war. But the main thing the quotations prove is the pro-Argentine comrades' lack of grip on the points in dispute.

Everyone in the WSL majority would agree that if the comparison with China

and the other colonies and semi-colonies of the 1930s referred to by Trotsky is legitimate, then we would not invoke the character of the Argentine regime as a reason for not siding with Argentina.

We could immediately arrive at agreement if the pro-Argentine comrades would - or could - tell us how, in what way, for what real national-liberation goals, or in what social/economic/political sense Argentina is fighting imperialism in the Falklands. But they can't.

Pro-Argentine comrades quote Trotsky (Writings 1938-9, p.34) saying that he would side with "semi-fascist" Brazil

against "democratic" Britain in a hypothetical war because: "If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro [i.e. will control Brazil] and will place double chains on Brazil [i.e., conquer it, or force territorial concessions from it, or unequal treaties, or impose political conditions which tie it economically to Britain's empire]".

Trotsky was quite right, in our view. If a similar situation arises today, what he wrote will be a blueprint for our attitudes.

They quote Trotsky in 1937 rejecting defeatism for China which was, under Chiang Kai-shek, beginning to organise a national war of liberation to drive out the Japanese armies that had been on

Chinese territory since 1931 and against which the Trotskyists had consistently called for a national war of liberation.

We believe Trotsky was 100% right about China. His comments as quoted would serve perfectly to guide us for any more or less comparable situation today.

But what Trotsky wrote about China naturally cannot serve as a concrete analysis of any situation today! That we must make for ourselves. And only on the basis of that analysis can we decide how much of Trotsky's blueprint is relevant to the given situation.

The comrades quote Trotsky advocating world working class support for Mexico

(Writings 1938-9, p.64), whose radical, perhaps quasi-revolutionary, bourgeois government had nationalised British oilfields.

Yes indeed. Trotsky was a good communist! But he was also a good Marxist.

They quote him pledging support for even the "barbarian" Bey of Tunis to drive out France! (Writings 1938-9, p.66).\*\* Yes! Trotsky had attended the Second Congress of the Communist International. He even wrote its manifesto, which said this:

"The Socialist who aids directly or indirectly in perpetuating the privileged

position of one nation at the expense of another, who accommodates himself to colonial slavery, who draws a line of distinction between races and colours in the matter of human rights, who helps the bourgeoisie of the metropolis to maintain its rule over the colonies instead of aiding the armed uprising of the colonies; the British Socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against London plutocracy - such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet, but in no case merits either a mandate or the confidence of the proletariat".

He had supported the wretched Negus, Haile Selassie, against the Italian

invasion. He even wrote this, which is a tremendous statement of the principles that must animate us on the national question:

"What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their 'right' to self-determination and to Parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations, it raises them up against their oppressors: it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries, it

instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilised executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism" (What Next?).

But these quotations merely beg the question - are they relevant to the Argentine situation? Was the Falklands war remotely, or at all, comparable to what Trotsky is talking about? Essentially, no.

## **The issue: national liberation**

Even in the shortest quote, the concrete issues involved - struggle for liberation against colonial armies, defence of the right of a backward state to expropriate foreign capital, etc. - is spelled out or referred to. Imperialism still operated through colonial empires, and the struggle for such empires and for their redivision was the substance of World War Two.

But Argentina was not threatened with double chains. The Argentine regime is a protector of foreign capital. They didn't even expropriate British capital as a gambit in the war.

Any comparison of Argentina with Tunisia, Mexico, or China of the '30s is preposterous. In terms of its level of development, role in its region, and place in the economic network of imperialism, it might be better compared with Italy or Japan of the 1930s - except that it is more developed than Japan was, and has a more or less fully-developed bourgeois social structure, which Japan and even Italy did not have.

The pro-Argentine comrades' way with quotations seems to me to be repugnant to the spirit of Marxism and the opposite of the practice of Marxist analysis. It rules out specific analysis, substituting instead dogmatic recipes and formulas. They mechanically apply texts derived

from past use of the Marxist method in concrete circumstances of the past. Those circumstances are not with us any more. They have evolved and developed and permuted to the present situation which is different - more or less radically different, but certainly different.

Even where changes are not very profound or major, we cannot just assume that the Marxist text dealing with some apparently similar situation is a sufficiently detailed and concrete depiction. That is to operate blindly dogmatically.

It is possible to "get by" when the changes are not all that great, and the chosen texts not too markedly ill-

matched to the concrete situation (but that means that whoever matches them has done at least some work on the concrete situation). On the basic ideas worked out by the geniuses of our movement, it is possible to "get by" for a very long time indeed.

## **How to use quotations**

Even the most miserable of "Trotskyist" sects works from a stock that retains a tremendous potency and relevance. But to adopt the method of dogmatic text-worship is to cut the roots of Marxism and to make renewal and living development difficult and ultimately

impossible.

Sooner or later it is no longer possible to "get by". The texts become dogmas preventing us from relating to reality, acting like distorting spectacles.

The notion that what Trotsky wrote in a very different world (dominated by colonial imperialism, for example) about countries like China can provide us directly with answers to the Argentine war is ridiculous. The principles, methods and ways of looking at the world remain what they were when Trotsky wrote, but to conclude that the texts embodying their results when applied to working through a concrete problem can directly offer us guidelines

now, the comrades would have to establish that similar or roughly similar conditions exist - that Argentina was faced with colonial invasion or something similar.

Since many comrades in fact admit that there was no real issue of Argentine national liberation served by the seizure of the Falklands, it is a culpable departure from the Marxist method to pretend to call Trotsky's voice from the grave to tell us what he thinks we should do over the Falklands war, and to cite what he said about China's resistance to the Japanese invaders as his answer.

It is sleight of hand, sand in the eyes, asking the relics to speak - but not

Marxism.

Marxists should use - or try to use - the classic texts of our movement in a different way: as models of analysis, and as guides and checks in the practice of living Marxist analysis.

If you compare any of Lenin's serious work with the texts of Stalinism, from the 20s to the 60s, you cannot fail to see the difference between Marxism and pseudo-Marxist scholasticism. The Stalinists quote the classics (as it suits them, of course) as themselves proof, themselves giving answers. Thus, for example, the theory of "socialism in one country" was "proved" true and Marxist by a few lines from an article by Lenin

written in 1915.

Lenin's writings are studded with quotations from Marx and Engels. He cites them to establish Marx's and Engels' views on a relevant issue at a given time. He then asks if the concrete reality has changed and evolved, and if so in what way, and how does it relate to other connected issues. He asks what modifications, additions or deletions to the views of Marx and Engels must be made in accordance with their method, criteria, principles, in the light of developments.

He thinks, works it through, reworks it, concretises the answers for his own time and conditions, on the basis of scientific

analysis. (See State and Revolution for example).

He frequently insisted against all dogmatists and quotation-mongers that "the truth is concrete". Political development in a revolutionary Marxist spirit is possible only by an unrelenting struggle for concreteness, for science.

The classic texts here are our starting point, our models, our historic "memory", our theoretical and political arsenal. We ourselves, however, must work out the political responses to our own problems and our own concrete reality. The books cannot think for us.

Quotation-mongering and "proof from

texts" was, and in some cases still is, the method of our anti-Marxist opponents. It is the measure of the state of the Trotskyist movement that the same quotations on China, Brazil and so on have been almost universally cited as if they could tell us anything directly about Argentina.

## **The letter to Rivera: analysis**

It is worth following through in detail a key text of Trotsky's - his letter to Diego Rivera, a profound and brief text which applies the principles we all share to China in 1937.

What is the issue? "China is a semi-colonial country which Japan is transforming, under our very eyes, into a colonial country. Japan's struggle is imperialist and reactionary. China's struggle is emancipatory and progressive." "Semi-colonial" meant that until the 1930s China suffered imperialist interventions, it ceded territory to the big powers, it ceded ports, it gave them special privileges - and then in 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria, in 1937 the rest of China.

And Argentina? Argentina is a region "big power", dominating Uruguay and Paraguay, vying for influence in Latin America with Brazil, skirmishing with Chile over disputed territory. Its national

integrity has been undisputed for 100 years at least. It is subordinated to imperialism not through the Falklands but by the agency of its own ruling class. Until 1930, or even 1948 it was one of the world's richer countries. It is a developed capitalist economy.

"Today he [Chiang Kai-shek] is forced despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the national independence of China..." This was not a symbolic war in which an aspirant regional imperialism and agent of big-power imperialist penetration led a fight over an irrelevant issue - it was a real national liberation war, against national subjugation.

Trotsky's example of the strike has been scandalously misused by the IMG. The union exists apart from the hideous things its leaders may do - or even its members (racist strikes). We are for the union, despite everything. It is a class organisation. We criticise it fundamentally by way of fighting to transform it. Trotsky uses the analogy of the union to point to what is threatened and worth defending, irrespective of what Chiang Kai-shek may do: the freedom of the Chinese people from Japanese control.

The Argentine people were not struggling to throw out an invader, they were not threatened with subjugation.

## **"Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive"**

"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 patriot\_ism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of 'social-patriotism' can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin..."

Argentina is not the victim of colonial imperialism (which Trotsky is talking about). It never has been. In his World War One writings, for example, Lenin

distinguished Argentina from the "semi-colonies" and bracketed it with Portugal (which itself had a vast colonial empire) as an economic satellite of Britain though politically independent. (Since then Argentina has long ceased to be an economic satellite of Britain.)

The exploitation of the Argentine workers is in part conducted by foreign capital - in tandem with the Argentine bourgeoisie. What have the Falklands got to do with that? What did the war have to do with that?

Chinese patriotism was not primarily backward-looking, xenophobic, etc., but progressive. Why? Not because it had been entirely purged of those aspects,

still less because those aspects could ever be progressive, but because it was the patriotism of a people rousing itself to modern political life, and rousing itself to struggle to throw out its conquerors. It was an expression of that struggle.

The attitude to the patriotism of the Chinese was determined by the real content of the struggle, which was a progressive struggle.

And our attitude to Argentine patriotism? We evaluate it as internationalists. We ask what cause it serves, what role it plays, how it relates to the struggles which have to be fought. We cannot answer these questions without an assessment of the issues in the war.

Argentine patriotism was as progressive as the cause it served - as progressive as the bourgeois military junta, on whose coat-tails the masses followed, tied by it. It was not progressive in the war. In relation to the Falkland Islanders it was chauvinist.

The sentence from Trotsky's article "A Fresh Lesson" usually cited on support for Mexico against Britain is preceded by this comment: "We deem it not only the right but the duty of workers in these [backward colonial and semi-colonial countries] actively to participate in the 'defence of the fatherland' against imperialism, on condition, to be sure, that they preserve the complete

independence of their class organisation and conduct a ruthless struggle against the poison of chauvinism." In the Chinese war of national liberation we would denounce as Chinese chauvinists any anti-imperialist militants - and especially any communist militants - who would treat any national, ethnic or religious minority the way Argentina wanted to treat the Falklanders.

We might have to say: the Argentine masses are chauvinist on the Falklanders, but that's a detail - if it were a mere detail. It was not: control over the islands was the issue over which the rival ruling classes, guided by prestige and chauvinism, clashed.

In fact, the attempt to treat Argentine nationalism as pure anti-imperialism is nothing but wishful thinking as far as I can make out. The comrades do not present any arguments, but only assertions and assumptions. At best they derive the progressive character of Argentine nationalism from the reactionary character of British imperialism: but the conclusion does not follow. We do not always put a plus where our enemies put a minus.

It does not follow that because mass militant mobilisation even on the Falklands issue could have opened channels in Argentina blocked [by the military coup] six years ago and (like the

consequences of any wild adventure or gamble often do) created great dangers for the junta, that Argentine nationalism is progressive or that we should support it.

A movement is progressive by its goals and its own logic, not by its possible side-effects. If the nationalist upheaval opens opportunities for Argentine socialists, we should be glad of the outcome. We cannot derive our own assessment of nationalism from that hope.

**... And Argentine nationalism?**

Argentina suffered British and French intervention some 140 years ago. Modern Argentina, however, has essentially taken shape over the last 100 years. Argentina had no war of liberation. Its population is, to within one per cent, of European immigrant origin - most from immigration within the last 100 years. Its mass popular nationalism dates from the 1920s. This nationalism was, especially in its labour movement manifestations, shaped and consolidated by Peronism.

Peronism was not and is not fascism. But corporatism and fascism are its essential ideological sources.

Peron had been in diplomatic service in

Italy at the end of the 1930s, and consciously copied fascism. Peronist nationalism is narrowly Argentine - directed against Chile and Brazil, for example. It has been anti-semitic: the murder gangs sponsored by the last Peronist government (1973-6) daubed walls with the slogan, "Kill a Jew a day". (There are about half a million Jews in Argentina.)

The "anti-imperialist" rhetoric of Peronism was a variant of the envious jingoism common to all fascist or fascist-coloured movements. It was hostile to the USA and Britain... and Brazil. In 1973 Peron called for a Spanish-speaking alliance against the English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking

Americans.

The anti-imperialism of the Peronists is like the anti-bourgeois sentiment of the fascists - imprecise, lacking scientific content, lacking definite, rational goals or means of struggle. It was and is harnessed by the bourgeoisie. To be progressive, the anti-imperialist sentiment needs to be refined and organised into an independent working-class movement with rational goals which will really strike at imperialism.

The pro-Argentine comrades' position amounts logically to this: we must follow any predatory junta in a (relatively) backward country when it clashes with an imperialist power - for the sake of the

symbolism of the clash! But no, comrades! We need an independent working-class point of view.

Communist anti-imperialism gives us that. It is not derived from a spurious two-camp pattern imposed on the world. It is derived from a unified working class viewpoint.

Everywhere that the working class exists, revolutionary Marxists identify it as the protagonist. Where national oppression exists, we still look to the working class as the protagonist.

From that point of view we approach a situation like 1937 in China where a Chiang Kai-shek may be beginning to

fight "our war". We never abandon our own politics, which include the drive to replace the Chiang Kai Sheks - even during a life-and-death war like the Sino-Japanese.

In contrast, the pro-Argentine view would turn us into passive consumers of world politics. We must pick and choose within the options. We dare not refuse our support to one side, even in a miserable business like the invasion of the Falklands. We strap the distorting spectacles tightly on our eyes, and we see the world around us not in terms of facts, class rule, class interests and real interactions - instead just imperialist and non-imperialist nations.

Obviously the hierarchy of the capitalist world economy is not irrelevant. But it cannot transform oppression into liberation, predatory pro-imperialist juntas into anti-imperialist fighters, the concrete realities of the Junta's petty land-grab into episodes of a supposed world liberation drama.

The two-camp spectacles are altogether too crude, too thick with layers of petty bourgeois politics, with the layers of previous accommodation by the post-war Trotskyist movement to various national liberation and Stalinist movements. In the notion of treating Argentina as meaningfully anti-imperialist - and necessarily so, despite the issue it clashed with imperialism on!

- a whole trend in post-war Trotskyism reached the outer limits of a recurrent swing away from class politics.

## **A necessary war?**

"In a war between two imperialist countries, it is a question neither of democracy nor of national independence, but of the oppression of backward non-imperialist peoples. In such a war the two countries find themselves on the same historic plane. The revolutionaries in both armies are defeatists. But Japan and China are not on the same historic plane."

Note well: Trotsky uses not abstract categories and labels, or static comparisons, but dynamic interactions as his criteria. It is possible for countries to be on the same historic plane (in relation to a concrete conflict or issue) without being identical. The idea that there is an absolute and stable division between imperialist and non-imperialist capitalisms is unhistorical and undialectical.

Trotsky did not get drunk on words and phrases, mistake images for concrete reality, or chase will-of-the-wisp "symbols" into the misty realm of fantasy politics where a Galtieri is designated the banner-bearer of anti-imperialism without reference to concrete analysis.

Trotsky continues: "The victory of Japan will signify the enslavement of China, the end of her economic and social development, and the terrible strengthening of Japanese imperialism. The victory of China will signify, on the contrary, the social revolution in Japan and the free development, that is to say, unhindered by external oppression, of the class struggle in China."

This "terrible strengthening of Japan" would not be a matter of prestige, "authority", or the figure it cut in the world. It would be strengthened by the plunder of China and the exploitation of hundreds of millions of Chinese - which was why Japanese victory would be the

end of Chinese economic and social development.

What goal does Trotsky spell out for the Chinese war of liberation? "Free development... unhindered by external oppression." And he speaks particularly of free development of the class struggle.

Concrete, precise, definable - not something derived from a different type of situation and imposed as a pattern on the Chinese events. The programme and attitude of the Marxists were grounded in the concrete situation, the real choices, and the consequent necessary development of the workers' struggle in China. Chiang Kai Shek was to be

"supported" with gritted teeth because the war was necessary and at that point he headed it. This did not mean political support to Chiang Kai-shek - on the contrary.

In Argentina? Few comrades would venture the view that the Falklands war was necessary. They would say only that defeat of Britain by the Argentine junta's army (not by the British working class) was necessary for its symbolic importance to anti-imperialism. The war was not necessary - but we should have supported Galtieri in the war because of the symbolic significance of it, once the junta had set it going. And that despite the fact that no-one on the left would have campaigned for the starting of the

war (the invasion), and many condemn it!

Wherever the pro-Argentine stance comes from, it is not from Trotsky's and other communists' attitude during the wars of the Chinese and others against colonial imperialism. That's for sure!

## **What does defencism mean?**

Trotsky's attitude was: "But can Chiang Kai-shek assure the victory? I do not believe so. It is he, however, who began the war and who today directs it. To be able to replace him it is necessary to gain decisive influence among the

proletariat and in the army, and to do that 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 and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, and 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.."

If Trotsky's arguments for supporting China were relevant to Argentina, then so also should have been this approach.

Pro-Argentine comrades should have focused their criticism of Galtieri on his weakness and insufficient ruthlessness in fighting for the islands.

The Peronists of course did that, so apparently, did the PST (Socialist Workers' Party, Morenist). But most pro-Argentine comrades shy away from this conclusion. Is it because they are half-aware of the falseness of treating Galtieri's war as a national liberation struggle?

**Defencism and political independence**

Further: for Trotsky defencism did not exclude working for civil war in nationalist China. On the contrary, the fight for national liberation demanded it - and anyway working class politics did.

Yet the WSL minority write:

"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 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'."

That's exactly what we are saying.

But you don't have to be a defeatist to say "Both working classes defeat your own ruling class". That is what Trotsky said in 1937 - even while standing with Chiang Kai-shek against Japan. Not to say it is to abandon the ground of working class politics ("for the duration").

Pursuing the class struggle...

In China in 1937 it was a real struggle for liberation against imperialism. Chinese "patriotism" flowed from our politics. We could therefore have an independent view on the matter from that of the Chinese nationalists.

We provisionally and conditionally arrived at the proposal of a national liberation bloc with them on the basis of our independent politics, which were never abandoned or shelved, never in any circumstances and not to the slightest degree.

On the Falklands, the pro-Argentine comrades have passively adopted someone else's viewpoint. They have proceeded not by analysing the concrete issues, but by fitting the war into a super-abstract image of the world as two camps, imperialist and non-imperialist capitalist states being separated by an unbridgeable chasm.

To fight in a war of liberation like the Chinese is not to abandon our politics - on the contrary, it is the only way we can maintain our class viewpoint as a living political force. By participating we serve, promote and develop our politics. We serve our politics by following where the logic of the class struggle and the real struggle against oppression and

exploitation directs us.

"We were the first to propose [a military bloc of the CP with the KMT]. We demanded, however, that the CP maintain its entire political and organisational independence, that is, that during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism [In the mid 20s, Chiang Kai-shek led one side against the regional warlords of Northern China], as in the national war against foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front lines of the military struggle, prepare the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie. We hold the same policies in the present [anti-Japanese] war. We have not changed our attitude one iota, The Oehlerites and

the Eiffelites, on the other hand, have not understood a single bit of our policies, neither those of 1925-7, nor those of today."

Likewise in 1982 the inverted Oehlerites and Eiffelites of the right fail to understand. In China there was an anti-imperialist war - defined as such by an independent Trotskyist assessment of the issues.

Either there is or there isn't a real issue of national liberation. If there is, then we have our own criteria, and a vast range of political independence in relation to a Chiang Kai-shek (or a Galtieri). If there is not, and if we side with Galtieri for the symbolic anti-imperialist significance of

his war, then for all the concrete issues we have to accept (for the time being) someone else's viewpoint.

If we go begging to the table of the Argentine junta for symbols, then we must take what we get - take things as they define them, rally to the issues they raise (which 'in themselves' we may not even accept). We have to dance to their tune, on their terrain.

For the Trotskyists in China, the starting point was: this is our war. They started from the issues. In contrast, a position on the Falklands war which starts from a vague, symbolic "anti-imperialist" identification with Argentina can only proceed by shelving independent

judgement on the issue of Argentina's claim to the islands and adopting someone else's judgment instead.

This is the method pursued by Trotsky's epigones for 30 and more years. It is not Marxism. It is not building in the class struggle.

It is instead an utterly artificial approach: the un-concrete, un-Marxist construction of a scenario, a world-picture, in which comrades ascribe an anti-imperialist role (that it isn't playing) to the pro-imperialist and sub-imperialist ruling class of the comparatively developed capitalist state of Argentina.

Facing reality...or reading off scenarios

The scenario approach comes from a vision of two great camps, imperialist and non-imperialist. We have argued that this is a falsely static and undialectical view of capitalism. It seems to me that the comrades are borrowing a pattern from the view of the world as divided between the Stalinist states and capitalism.

Now between the USSR and imperialism there is a difference of class character. For imperialism and "non-imperialism", both "camps" are capitalist.

The vision is therefore false. But the method of taking sides on issues automatically with the "progressive"

camp is radically false even for the USSR.

A model of how to judge from an independent proletarian standpoint even those states (China in the '30s, the USSR) that we may have good and imperative reason to support, is given in a discussion by Trotsky with Li Fu-Jen [in fact the American Frank Glass].

"Trotsky: ... The slogan 'for revolutionary unity with the Soviet Union, with the proletarians of the whole world' should rather be, 'Unity with the proletariat of the whole world. and for an alliance with the Soviet Union on the basis of a concrete programme in the interests of the liberation of China.' The Soviet Union is

now the bureaucracy - no blind confidence in the Soviet Union!

Li Fu-jen: If the Nanking [Chiang Kai Shek] government should enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union, and the alliance should be of such a nature as to harm China and benefit only the Soviet Union, what should our attitude be towards it?

Trotsky: A military alliance against Japan would be in any case preferable for China, even with the bureaucracy as it is. But then we must say that we demand that the Soviet Union deliver munitions, arms for the workers and peasants; special committees must be created in Shanghai, in workers' centres; the treaty

must be elaborated with the participation not only with the KMT but also with the worker and peasant organisations.

We ask for an open proclamation from the Soviet bureaucracy that at the end of the war no part of China would be occupied without the consent of the Chinese people, etc.

Li Fu-jen: Do you then think that the Soviet Union could be capable of conducting an imperialistic policy?

Trotsky: If it is capable of organising frame-ups, killing the revolutionaries, it is capable of all possible crimes."

(Trotsky on China, p.562-3, emphasis

added).

Remarkable dialogue! Carefully, precisely and with the brutal honesty we need in order to be revolutionaries able to grasp and change reality, Trotsky sizes up the allies he is supporting (and he supported the USSR against imperialism unconditionally).

Would Trotsky be capable of forgetting about the concrete issues like the Falklands, or of consoling himself with the idea that Argentina was non-imperialist and therefore the junta could not possibly conduct an "imperialistic" policy?

No, he would not. He did not accept the

Chiang Kai-shek clique or the Stalin bureaucracy for their symbolic value. He had concrete class reasons for allying with them. Those set the limits of the alliance. There was no ideological or political subordination. He never ceased to look at them in all their details with the eyes of a mortally hostile opponent. He never let the dark shadows of their imperialist opponents obscure the hideous anti working class features of Chiang Kai Shek or Stalin.

## **The truth - no matter how bitter**

Trotsky could never have fallen into the method which allowed comrades to

reach pro-Argentine conclusions on the Falklands.

This method was to take the elements in the situation (war, working class chauvinism in Argentina expressed in Peronist "anti-imperialist" terms, etc.) and rearrange them into a superoptimistic scenario culminating in revolutionary working class victory.

The chauvinist mobilisation on the political coat-tails of the bourgeoisie became transformed - in some people's heads - into a mobilisation against the system.

Everything "favourable" to the scenario was highlighted, the rest faded out. The

most blatant example was when the USFI press reprinted a speech by the junta's foreign minister, Costa Mendez, as anti-imperialist good coin. More widely, much was made of a jingo Argentine demonstration where the slogan was chanted, "Malvinas Yes, Galtieri No". Faded out was the other part of the same chant - according to the Economist - "The Malvinas are Argentina's, the people are Peron's". And Peron's legacy was what Galtieri was trying to appropriate: he was attempting to answer the call of the Peronist leaders for a new caudillo.

The scenario was constructed; then, in deference to the great revolutionary prospects, assessment of the war was

read backwards from the scenario. The sordid details of Galtieri's sally were transmuted by the assurance that it was only the first stage of a process due to culminate in the most militant anti-imperialist struggle.

This has been the method of "Pabloism" (a bad term, but a common one) for 30 years. It is not Marxism. It is even below the level of the serious bourgeois commentators. It breaks with what Trotsky defined as a cardinal rule of the Fourth International: "To face reality squarely... to call things by their right names, to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be."

In the final analysis, "scenario" politics is

fantasy politics, and fantasy politics is passive politics. Instead of using Marxist realism as a preparation for a revolutionary changing of the world, it means "changing the world" in our heads by way of wishful thinking.

## **The logic of the class struggle**

It means failing to follow the cardinal injunction of Marxism, expressed by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme thus: "To be guided by the logic of the class struggle."

The "logic of the class struggle" includes for us the logic of genuine liberation

movements. These can be complementary to, and not counterposed to, the class struggle of the working class internationally and in the oppressed country. But if there is no issue of liberation struggle actually involved in the war, then it becomes possible to take sides only outside of the logic of the class struggle.

In the letter to Rivera Trotsky describes the sectarians as following closely behind and "correcting" him, adding a moustache where he draws a woman's face and an egg where he draws a cock and so on. He did not foresee that 45 years later most of those calling themselves Trotskyists would use the art of collage to cut out the picture he drew

of China in 1937 and to paste it over the figure of Argentina in 1982 - an Argentina that has more in common with the Japan of 1937 than with the China of that time.



# **Chapter 4: The WSL and the Falklands crisis, by Sean Matgamna, May 1982**

This article was written for internal discussion in the Workers' Socialist League in May 1982. It came between a meeting of the (smaller) WSL Executive Committee on Sunday 9 May 1982, which voted by a majority to change the previous WSL policy of opposing the war on both British and Argentine sides, to siding with Argentina; and a meeting of the (larger) WSL National Committee on Sunday 16 May 1982, which voted by a majority to keep the previous policy.

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"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones... these are the rules of the Fourth International" - Leon Trotsky

## **How this dispute arose**

Last Sunday five out of eight comrades present at the EC voted to change the basic position of the organisation on the conflict between Britain and Argentina, over the Falkland Islands. They voted to drop the call for Argentina to withdraw from the Falklands - not to avoid using it in the paper in a way that might blunt the

edge of our defeatism towards Britain (which is common ground), but to remove it completely as our basic position. They voted that the WSL should adopt a 'victory to Argentina' position.

I shall hereafter refer to the position we held. in common at the last NC and. up to the EC as the old position, and that of the majority of the EC as the new position.

Of those absent two (Parkinson and Carolan) were known to be emphatically for the old. position. As far as I know neither of the other two (Gardiner and Noonan) had expressed. support for a change of line.

Four of those voting for the new position (Smith, Jones, Cunliffe, Levy) argued that it was not a matter of changing the WSL position but of 'developing' it in line with the development of the conflict into outright war. One (Morrow) argued that the WSL's position had been mistaken throughout and should be rectified.

Now either it is common ground between the two sides that there has been an important change in the situation, not taken account of in our positions so far - or it isn't. It isn't. Varying assessments exist on the importance of the 12 mile limit imposed, by Britain on Argentina. But on the basic issues a substantial part of the EC

rejects the idea that there has been a radical change in the situation demanding a radical change by the WSL. We reject the idea that the EC majority last Sunday voted to 'develop' the old position: they voted to overturn and. negate it.

From this arose the question of the status of the EC decision.

The EC has the power of the NC between NCs. It cannot normally reverse NC positions except in response to new situations and important exigencies unforeseen at the time of the NC taking its position. At the April 25 NC there had been a motion from the Merseyside branch calling for the WSL to come out

for Argentine victory. No NC member voted. for it - two abstained.

It was a badly attended NC. Had there been a serious dispute, then the bad attendance would have meant that the decision lacked authority. But there was no serious dispute among NC members.

The Merseyside NC members were absent, but they would have voted against their branch's motion had they been there. Comrade Eliot spoke in favour of the motion but did not vote for it - presumably she was swayed in the discussion. Cds Jones and Cunliffe were present at the NC and. supported the decisions taken.

At the time of the NC it was already plain that the conflict in the Falklands was likely to be a major one. The sinking of the two ships does not amount to a qualitative change since the time of the NC: the two sides have started shooting from the positions and postures they already held at the time of the NC. "Thatcher threatens pitched battle" was already our front-page head. immediately after the NC, without anyone suggesting that this should change our basic line.

In any case, the decision to change the basic position could not reasonably be justified as an urgent response to the escalation of the war. A change of position to that of favouring Argentina

could not arise unless the entire character of the war and of Britain's objectives in it changed.. Our politics are not conjunctural, dependent on the ebbs and flows of battle. They flow from principled class analysis.

For these reasons supporters of the old position on the EC insisted that the EC position could not become WSL policy unless endorsed by an NC. The EC majority comrades accepted that. It was then a question of whether to wait two weeks for the scheduled NC or have an emergency NC this weekend. The new position comrades chose the latter.

## **The TILC resolution**

The resolution put by the WSL EC to the TILC conference at Easter (IB 5) remains an adequate revolutionary platform for our work in Britain and elsewhere.

The new position comrades believe it commits us to a change of position such as they advocate in conditions which they say now exist. We shall see that they are mistaken.

This is the relevant 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 if

Argentina".

The second part of the sentence, following the comma, is not as clear as it might be. The first part is perfectly clear and adequate. It defines how we see the conflict and therefore what is meant in the second part of the sentence by "full-scale war".

## **A shift in the situation?**

The question is not the scale of the war but its nature. Is it war over the Falklands, or a threat by British imperialism to subjugate Argentina, an escalation of the conflict (not of the military action) to the point of the survival of Argentina's sovereignty displacing the

## Falklands as the issue in dispute?

Some comrades, if I understand them correctly, argue that the Falklands are no longer the issue because the war is now a trial of strength between imperialism and Argentina. Every war is a trial of strength between the rival powers, and this conflict was a trial of strength right from April 2. Neither government is or was fundamentally concerned for the Falklands or the Falklanders. Both the British imperialist government and the Argentine sub-imperialist military dictatorship are concerned to assert their prestige and strength by seizing the islands. That defines the war as reactionary on both sides. The war would become a progressive one on

Argentina's side only if it became one between British imperialism and Argentine national liberation.

No such shift has taken place. The fighting does not amount to such a shift. The 12 mile limit is a blow within the parameters of the conflict over the Falklands. All war is a conflict over disputed 'sovereignty' and a trial of strength.

Even the most brutal and reactionary particular blows struck by Britain cannot change Galtieri's war into a progressive war. If Britain bombs mainland Argentine airfields and ports, we will denounce the imperialist act. But when Galtieri uses such British aggression to obscure the

overall picture and, claim that his war is really one to defend Argentine national rights, it will still be the duty of Argentine Marxists to explain that Galtieri is lying.

To focus on the individual blows at Argentine sovereignty at the expense of the overall nature of the war implies to be for Argentina. This could only be grounded in principled proletarian politics if overall assessment of the war led us to back Argentina. But assessment of the issues led us in fact to indignantly reject the attempt of the Argentine junta to extend and assert its sovereignty over the islands. To become sensitive to the implications for Argentine sovereignty of this or that blow in the war so that we forget that we

rejected Argentina,'s clam to extend its area of sovereignty - that is to lose our bearings, It is to abandon principled politics and adopt what Rosa Luxemburg, writing against the centrists in World War 1, called:

"not fundamental tactics, but conjunctural politics, cut to fit the military situation of the moment... the famous politics from case to case, the old opportunistic see-saw politics..."

## **War and politics**

War is a continuation of politics by other means, as Morrow rightly says. To have an attitude to the war, once shooting starts, in contradiction with our attitude to

the politics which it continues (the Argentine invasion and the British response) violates that principle. It is to recommend to Argentine Marxists that they should be like the traitor-socialists in 1914: very internationalist, very intransigent, very clear in their assessment of the forces in conflict - until the first shot was fired! It is ourselves to capitulate. It is not capitulation to the pressure of our own bourgeoisie, rather to the pressure which is closest to us, that of the left: but failure to keep our bearings against such small, immediate pressures today is bad preparation for keeping our bearings against bigger and worse pressures tomorrow.

## **The basis of our position**

Our principles, spelled out at the beginning, are these:

- 1) Argentina has no legitimate claim to the Falklands.
- 2) The Argentine regime is a major bulwark of imperialism in South America. The invasion was designed to reinforce the Argentine military against working class opposition and other sections of the Argentine ruling class. It was an act of colonialism.
- 3) Argentina should not have invaded, and should. now withdraw.

4) We are defeatists for British Imperialism. Britain is neither primarily motivated by the just demands of the Falkland islanders to decide their own future free of military rule by a foreign people, nor a reliable defender of those demands.

## **The Argentine claim to the Falklands: history**

The Argentine claim is preposterous from a working-class point of view, and totally irrelevant to serious anti-imperialism.

The historical facts are these (taken from the Encyclopaedia Americana).

There is a dispute about whether an English or a Spanish ship first discovered the Falklands in the 16th century. British settlement began in 1765 (no doubt motivated by the strategic importance of the island's position). It was at first resisted but in 1771 recognised and accepted by Spain. Britain abandoned the island in 1774. After 1774 Spain built houses and fortifications on the islands but abandoned them in 1811. Then in 1821 the Argentine federation sent two dozen colonists led by Louis Vernet. Vernet's 'government' seized a US sealing ship for 'encroachment'. The US - the democratic republic, then the beacon for revolutionary democrats throughout the world, whose expansion at the expense

of stagnant Mexico in the 1840s Marx was to defend and praise - sent a corvette, the 'Lexington', which forced many of the colonists to evacuate.

In 1833 Britain removed the remaining settlers and British settlement began again. It has been continuous since then. Some of the present inhabitants are said to be descendants of the 1833 settlement.

150 years is a long time. In 1833 Argentina was a backward country, a federation loosely tied together on the basis of the old. Spanish colonial administrative unit (from which Uruguay and Paraguay had broken off). Whole vast areas of the American continent like

California were still not settled; states were still being carved out; the markets that would knit the viable ones together were still rudimentary or undeveloped. Modern Argentine nationalism, which dates from the 1920s, was a century in the future.

The idea that Argentine possession of the Falklands for four years gives it a valid claim/grievance that remains good down the years and has weight against the fact that a distinct population has been shaped in the Falklands has nothing in common with Marxism. It can only be justified on grounds of revanchist Argentine nationalism and a nationalism of a mystical sort, outside of history and material and social facts.

## **The Argentine claim - our criteria**

For Marxists the decisive question is the wishes of the population - other things being equal. The population of the Falklands is historically, culturally linguistically, nationally, and in its conception of itself a distinct entity. There is no sense in which it is Argentine. It is also markedly cut off and distinct geographically - 400 miles from Argentina.

Are other things equal? Yes. They do not exploit any other community in the islands. The islands are not - and in fact never have been - a base from which Argentina was dominated, threatened,

or subjugated.

Are the islands a potential site for imperialist military bases? Yes. But Britain and Argentina are part of the same imperialist bloc. And there is strong evidence (see the New Statesman article circulated in photocopy) that Argentine possession could well be the prelude to the establishment of a base by the US.

In any case, for us to say it is better that Argentina should have the islands and the potential for military bases there, and that therefore we support Argentina in occupying a foreign territory to which it has no right we recognise and subjugating the people of that territory to

get those bases - what does that come down to in working-class political terms?

There are no possible working-class or socialist gains from such an occupation. It will not 'liberate' or lessen military pressure on a Third World country (which Argentina anyway essentially is not). It will not be a blow against imperialism - on the contrary it may well strengthen the hand of imperialism in the South Atlantic, specifically the hand of US imperialism, to which Argentina serves as a sub-imperialism in the region.

**Under what circumstances should our basic position be changed?**

These were the considerations that led.

us to reject the idea of siding with Argentina in the conflict, and which underpin the TILC resolution.

They would only be offset if the entire character of the war changed and if Argentina were threatened with reduction to a colony or semi-colony. The fact that Britain is an imperialist power and Argentina a mere adjunct of US imperialism - a capitalist economic and military power of the second or third rank, playing the role of a sub-imperialism in the region - would then have implications for our attitude to the conflict.

But such a change in the character of the war would require far more than

episodic shifts on the battlefield or an escalation of fighting. It would require a political and strategic shift so huge as to be barely conceivable.

"If England should be victorious she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil ", says Trotsky in a discussion quoted by Morrow, arguing in 1938 for siding with Brazil despite the Vargas dictatorship - in a possible war with Britain. But the Vargas regime was one of very different character from Galtieri's, and the motives Trotsky envisaged for a possible war were different. The world situation was also very different

If Britain were still a flourishing

imperialism, an attempt by it to put 'another fascist' in control of Argentina and place 'double chains' on it might be logical and likely as the British war aim in a conflict initiated on an apparently irrelevant motives.

But Britain lost its economic domination over Argentina four decades ago. There is no evidence that it sees regaining that domination as a realistic objective.

For four decades British imperialism has been in rapid decline. It has proved unable to maintain military control even over small outposts like Aden. After the Vietnam war, even US imperialism finds itself weak, unable to impose its will on Nicaragua and having great difficulty in

El Salvador.

Against this background in this context, it is inconceivable that Britain could succeed. in conquering Argentina - a major industrialised country, with a level of development similar to Spain, Greece, or Portugal. It is even more inconceivable that in an effort at conquest Britain could retain the united support of imperialism which the 'new position' comrades make so much of. The US and Italy, in particular, which dominate Argentina economically today, are hardly going to support an attempt by Britain to replace them as the dominant power.

The replacement of the Galtieri regime

is certainly not an objective of imperialism. Dennis Healey, the nearest thing to an official spokesperson for US imperialism among leading British politicians, told the Tories last week that while he supported them fully they should beware on one point. They should not push so hard that Galtieri falls! The replacement would surely be much less amenable to imperialism.

For the war to change to an effort by Britain to subjugate Argentina would require a great change in the whole world situation.

## **The TILC resolution and us**

During the TILC conference we had to

have a recess to allow the WSL delegation to discuss our position. We had found divergent attitudes/ positions to exist within support for the common resolution. We reached agreement on that occasion. It is now clear, however, that different understandings of the resolution persisted. None of us expected that the conflict would reach the level of military seriousness it has reached. Now some comrades want to abandon our basic assessment because it has become a serious military conflict.

The way to proceed, however, is not by pretending that we are 'developing' the old position, but to re-examine our basic positions. If we have made a mistake -

and whether they know it or not that tis what the position of SJLC implies - we must be prepared to say so. Otherwise we will miseducate ourselves and the rest of the organisation.

## **The positions in the dispute**

There are two basic positions in the dispute - that of the TILC resolution and that of Morrow. Then there is a hybrid position - SJLC - which accepts the basic assessments of the TILC resolution and wants now to add to those assessments the conclusions that flow (and flow logically) from Morrow's position.

Only two of these positions are tenable -

Morrow's and ours. The hybrid position does not add up.

Either Argentina has rights in the Falklands or it doesn't. Either the issue is one of imperialism versus some degree of liberation of a 'dependent' country, a 'neo-colony' or whatever - or else it isn't.

Either Argentina has rights and real national liberation issues involved, and we side with it in a struggle for them - or it doesn't.

Morrow says it does have rights in the Falklands and therefore that there is a real issue of Argentine national liberation involved. Though he would not

have advocated the invasion he supports the position that flows from it. This is logically consistent - even though it is rubbish as a picture of the real world and of the issues in the dispute.

SJLC say that Argentina had and has no rights in the Falklands, that it shouldn't have invaded, that it should have got out when Britain was merely threatening it. Now they also say that it ceased to be necessary for Argentina to get out - when? When the Belgrano was sunk? When the 12 mile limit was imposed? That is, when the military consequences of the act of war carried out by Argentina and the fact that the British ruling class decided to fight began to fall into place.

Politics that turn 360 degrees on their axis according to conjunctural events, to the ebbs and flows of the war within the parameters of the military conflict over the Falklands, contain all sorts of contradictions.

Not only the Belgrano was sunk; so was the Sheffield. We are told that British ships are vulnerable. It is quite possible that other British ships will be sunk; that there will be very big casualties in an invasion of the Falklands.

It is ruled out that the comrades' conjunctural politics on the issue should swing to support for Britain. But if Argentina is doing well - slaughtering the British, rendering the blockade

ineffective, holding positions in the islands against invasion - will that then modify the position of support for Argentina that the comrades adopted when the Belgrano was sunk? Why not? Why shouldn't the basic assessment (flowing from our view of the rights and wrongs of the issue) reassert itself? Logically it should (and the military picture I have painted is not fantastic. Over a few months Britain probably could not sustain the war effort without US logistic support).

## **A test case against imperialism?**

But in fact, if I understand the comrades, their shift is not really a response to this or that event, even though the events

may have fuelled or triggered it, but they say that the war, whatever the issue, has become a great test case between imperialism and - what? Either imperialism versus national liberation - i.e. anti-imperialism is involved. in the Falklands dispute - or not. And in the basic analysis SJLC say it is not.

The great test case approach flows from an assessment of how it appears in the world, of where the sympathies of the Latin American masses lie, of whether the events will be a negative or a plus in the consciousness of anti-imperialists throughout the world.

It is true that the overwhelming sentiment in Latin America is for Argentina. For the

rest, such things as world-wide psychological moods are extremely hard to gauge. And they cannot be a determinant for Marxist politics. Moreover: if they can, they should have led us to support Argentina right from April 2.

In his discussion of proletarian morality, of the alleged a-moralism of Lenin and Bolshevism, or their supposed adherence to the (alleged) Jesuit principle of the end justifying the means, Trotsky formulated the question of what can and cannot be admissible for proletarian revolutionaries approximately as follows: Do whatever rouses the masses, strengthens their combativity, self-confidence and revolutionary

consciousness.

Support, once it is engaged with Britain in a shooting war, for the Argentine state on the grounds that the issue has become a test case between imperialism and the others, because it is seen as such, would be far outside Trotsky's formula. It abuses the consciousness of the subjectively anti-imperialist masses on a number of important points.

## **Argentine chauvinism**

It is in the nature of nationalist movements and sentiments to ignore or resent and suppress their own closest minority nations, peoples or fragments

of peoples. Unless some greater principle is involved (such as the Argentine people's right not to have the Falklands used as a base to threaten or subjugate them) it is an outrage to proletarian democracy to brutally seize the people of the Falklands. Marxists need to say that - and, to say it clearly. The Argentine socialist who does not say it is an Argentine chauvinist. Actions like this, appropriately carried out by the butcher junta, poison and miseducate the masses who accept them as a blow against imperialism.

## **Fake anti-imperialism**

Colonialism and anti-imperialism are not identical, Colonialism is close to

being a historical category. Imperialism is dominant in most of the world. The rhetoric of anti-colonialism is not anti-imperialism.

Quite the contrary (and as Morrow should think about this) - the presently dominant imperialist power, the USA, had anti-colonialism as a major ideological weapon of its drive to imperial hegemony on the basis of its gigantic economic strength. Until after it had used dollar power to finally prise open the old French and British imperialist blocks - that is, until the late 1940s - anti-colonialism was central to the ideology of US imperialism.

General sentiments against colonialism,

or against imperialism conceived vainly as colonialism, can actually shield the operation of the imperialism that really exists, as it really exists.

The vast waves of the colonial revolution that rolled for three decades after World War 2 have left capitalist regimes in varying degrees of subservience to imperialism and of economic dominance by capital from the metropolitan countries. The only alternative would have been. the international socialist revolution. The rhetoric of anti-colonialism continues to express the resentment and the aspirations of the masses, but with less and less purchase on the realities of the world.

In Latin America there is a vast continent-wide hatred of foreign economic domination. It is a political factor that regimes of all sorts of political coloration have to take into account. Studied assertiveness, 'insolence' and denunciation of the US are staples of Latin American regimes. But the economic ties continue,

Theoretically there are two alternatives to such economic ties continuing in their existing forms.

1. Proletarian revolution which would transform them, and the place of the less developed countries in the world economy.

2. To attempt to become nationally autarkic. In fact this is impossible and would be totally reactionary. Yet ideologically the 'inner life' of the sort of undefined mass populist nationalism that is so widespread in Latin America is a dialogue between the reactionary utopia of autarky (often consciously held up as a goal by Maoists and other 'leftists') and the proletarian revolution. Autarky is the logical goal of the nationalist demagogues from, right to left. Most of them know better - and fake.

**... And why we should. not endorse it**

Support for the idea that the Argentine junta is striking a blow at imperialism in the current dispute will do the opposite

of raising consciousness on such questions.

The sabre-rattling of the Argentine junta is part of the faking endemic to all Latin American bourgeois regimes. The comrades know that the invasion was almost certainly a desperate throw by the junta as everything around them threatened to collapse. Yet now they say that because the junta has succeeded in passing off their annexation of the Falklands as genuine anti-imperialism (remember, SJLC share with us the view that it wasn't), we should rush to endorse the conmanship, lap up and spread the delusion, I can't see any sense in this.

The job for Marxists is to keep their

heads, analyse the world, and, to those we can reach, then explain the comradeship of junta anti-imperialism and make propaganda for our international socialist programme

Our political, moral and actual right to talk to the Latin American masses is secured by our revolutionary defeatism towards our own government. We have to maintain the political clarity to explain (and, to understand) what real anti-imperialism is and what the stock-in-trade of the bankrupt bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians of the 3rd World is.

We won't do that if we go beyond British defeatism and support Argentina, either

on the basis of the lie (which we knew and said to be a lie) that the Falklands are an issue in a real anti-imperialist struggle, or, indefensibly and unforgivably, because we want to jump on the bandwagon in support of the fake anti-imperialism of the Argentine Junta.

## **Effects of an Argentine victory**

The psychological speculation about the world - or Latin American - masses in the present conflict is speculation and, as I argue, not the decisive thing anyway. A likely effect of a victory for Argentina, however, to which comrades should apply their minds, is that it will strengthen the junta and secure the grip of this murderous regime over the Argentine

workers for another period.

That defeat for the Argentine working class will continue to be a major factor in the mass psychology of Latin America long after any illusory feeling that justice is being done consequent on an Argentine victory has vanished, leaving nothing behind. it.

We should fight for the defeat of British imperialism. But those who want positive support for Argentina should tell us what assessment they make of the consequences to mass anti-imperialist psychology of the continued rule of the butchers of the Argentine working class for the period ahead.

If there were a genuine issue of Argentine national rights, a genuine anti-imperialist struggle, then we would have no choice but to side with even this junta, striving to create working class independence within the struggle for liberation. The model would be the Trotskyists' support for China's national war against the Japanese invaders, under the leadership of the counter-revolutionary Chiang Kai Shek.

Those who assert that such is the case with Argentina are utterly confused (Morrow) or Argentine chauvinists and dyed-in-the-wool capitulators to Peronist nationalism (Moreno). But at least they are consistent and logical after a fashion.

Not so SJLC, who like us deny all that and merely want to take sides according to the issues as the junta in Buenos Aires have succeeded in misrepresenting them to a lot of people.

It was possible to talk of a national war of Chinese liberation in 1937 even under the leadership of Chiang Kai Shek, and our comrades then did that. It is scarcely possible to think of an analogous type of struggle against the sort of imperialism that dominates Latin America and much of the world. Working class independence and a working class programme are the basis for fighting an imperialism that operates through economic penetration and domination.

Any explicit or implied programme to lop off the links with the world market and roll the second rank capitalist countries backward economically is reactionary and contrary to the working-class international programme. In the historical experience of versions of this being tried, from Argentina in the '40s to '60s to Southern Ireland from 1932 to '58, it is a blind alley.

Therefore proletarian independence is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the very possibility of the class being able to play its progressive historic role and avoiding being taken in tow by nationalist demagoguery.

To endorse the Argentine junta as anti-

imperialist or objectively anti-imperialist is to forget all about this, and. to see our political responsibility as stretching no further than to go with the 'left' 'mass' mood. That is to misunderstand. the fundamental raison d'etre of the WSL.

To endorse militaristic, tokenist, mini-colonialist action like the junta's invasion as anti-imperialist is to take responsibility for presenting reactionary and counter-productive deeds by the enemies of the working class and the supporters of imperialism in Argentina and elsewhere, as anti-imperialism.

## **Telling the truth**

What we do and don't do is aimed to

heighten the awareness of the working class and oppressed masses of their real situation and what they really must do to change it. To present the anti-working class junior partners of US imperialism who rule in Buenos Aires as anti-imperialist or objectively anti-imperialist is to tell lies to all whom we can reach.

Even in terms of the political species to which it belongs, the junta's anti-imperialism is spurious and hollow. All Latin American regimes fake for the masses while maintaining the key economic links. Since 1976 the junta has systematically and successfully dismantled the economic-nationalist structure built up since the early '40s and

set out to attract foreign capital.

As Marxists we hold no brief for the previous system. Far from it. But what does it mean to tell the Latin American masses, or rather to endorse the current lie, that it is meaningful anti-imperialism - or objectively anti-imperialism, or a symbolic test case of anti-imperialism, for this junta, the organiser of big new penetration of imperialist capital in Argentina, to do what it has done in the Falklands? It is to become a part of the utter political disorientation and confusion that reigns among Third World revolutionaries whose ideological tools for understanding modern imperialism are the conceptions appropriate to the struggle against colonialism.

Even if the Falklands were a real issue of Argentine sovereignty that would be so - because they would be such a marginal element. For those like SIJC who don't think that the Falklands are even that - the proper conclusion to their analysis is the one we formerly held. in common.

We do not endorse the 'anti-imperialism' of the junta - either before the invasion, after it, or during the war that is the consequence of it.

## **Internationalism**

What SJLC propose can also only have a harmful effect on the internationalist

consciousness of the British working class. In effect what they propose is to abandon the goal of internationalism and (in the belief that we are being anti-imperialist) adopt Argentine - or Latin American bloc - nationalism, The nationalism of the oppressed is not the same as the nationalism of the oppressor. But this profound thought translates into concrete terms according to what is going on in the real world.

And of course Leninists are never participants in even the nationalism of the oppressed. We try to co-opt its progressive goals (freedom from oppression, freedom of development) into our internationalist working class politics.

The anti-imperialist demagoguery of the present Argentine regime is part of the mere ideological form of Argentine nationalism and chauvinism. Argentina has had no struggle for national independence in any modern sense - or in any sense since 1811. Modern Argentine nationalism dates from the '20s and '30s and was part of the worldwide wave of nationalism and chauvinism then.

Since the '40s it has been dominated by Peronism, which in some of its forms consciously copied fascism. Moreover, Argentina is a state consisting entirely of white European colonists - a down-market Canada or Australia, vastly

different from most Latin American countries. To describe existing Argentine nationalism and chauvinism as anti-imperialism is, I believe, culpably naive .

What do the British workers see in the Falklands war? A vicious regime, warlike aggression, the seizure of territory and of inoffensive British people 300 miles away from Argentina the denial of all rights of self-control to these people. Is this the result of imperialist brainwashing? No it isn't. It is much of the truth.

Now it is true that most British workers do not oppose British imperialism. How do we get them to do so? By telling them that they should forget about the

considerations listed above and see it in term of the overall struggle against imperialism? We would. have to do that - if it were true. Apart from Morrow all the EC are agreed (more or less) that it isn't.

In situation of real conflict between imperialism and a colony, neo-colony or sub-imperialist country involving a fight by the latter for its rights, we would proceed by pointing out what the issues were, the injustices being fought against, and arguing that socialists and trade unionists should support the fight and oppose imperialism. We would. appeal to them on a common class interest. Nothing like this is possible since no such issues exist in the Falklands dispute.

The idea that the main enemy is in our own country is the core of our politics. It is perfectly rational and understandable to workers faced with Thatcher and Thatcherism. We can explain it rationally. There is no way that we can so explain the 'victory to Argentina' rider that the comrades want to add to it.

The addition of the call for 'victory of Argentina' can only act in the consciousness of thinking British workers against accepting British defeatism. on the grounds that the main enemy is at home.

That idea is grounded. on internationalism, on the idea of an

international interest by workers throughout the world, which will be pursued throughout the world.

In a classic situation of war of imperialism against imperialism, we answer the question 'what if the other side wins'? by talking of our class brothers and sisters on that side of the divide and. of their defeatism. We have habitually charged the social patriots on either side of such a conflict with destroying the rational basis of defeatism on the other side, and. thus throwing the workers there into the arms of their ruling class.

In any war where there is reason to actively support the opponents of our

own ruling class, the internationalist reasoning would be deployed. as above, expressed in terms of a class interest in common and of a common interest with the oppressed nation (or whatever) against our own ruling class.

But Leninists in Argentina now should be defeatists because (a) Galtieri's war is a diversion, (b) there is no anti-imperialist content to it, and it will strengthen the allies of imperialism in power in Argentina, (c) they should defend the democratic rights of the Falklanders, which in the circumstances include the right to secede.

For us to adopt the Argentine nationalism implied in the joint position

of Morrow and SJLC cannot be presented in internationalist terms to the British working class - not rationally anyway, not in terms of anything more clear than cloudy notions of a struggle between a secondary imperialist power and a sub-imperialists where we choose to follow Latin American regionalist feeling,

## **The left and. the Falklands crisis**

We have stood more or less alone (the SWP has been close to us but has wobbled badly) in maintaining a balanced class position of stark opposition to our ruling class and state, with a refusal to imbibe or spread. illusions about their Argentine opposite

numbers. We linked up with an Argentine militant in Britain to preach defeatism and international solidarity to the British labour movement.

I think this is a record. we have reason to be proud of - if we do not now proceed to 'develop' it into its opposite. We should reject the proposals of SJLC.



# **Chapter 5: Some reflections on the left and the Falklands war, by Sean Matgamna. May, 2007**

The two month "Falklands War" between Britain and Argentina in 1982 was a freak event. It was part of no larger conflict; no issue other than possession of the islands was involved.

Both Argentina and Britain were bourgeois states. Neither of them oppressed, and neither of them was trying to conquer the other, or likely to, as a result of the war.

The Falklands Islands were not a base from which Britain oppressed others in the region, and never had been. The only issue between Britain and Argentina, the cause of the war, was the fate of the Falklands Islands and their inhabitants.

Living 400 miles across the South Atlantic from Argentina, the Falkland Islanders were British. In identity, desired international affiliation, language and culture, they were British. The islands had been British since the 1830s, when the modern Argentine state had not yet emerged.

Argentina's claim to the Falklands rested on a few years of formal possession by Argentina's predecessor state, a century

and a half in the past, and on their comparative geographical proximity to it.

Against that stood the wishes of the inhabitants to remain British and their no less strong desire not to be subjected to Argentine rule.

In addition to that, Argentina's rulers were then, under General Galtieri, a murderous, unpopular military junta. By invading the islands, they sought to make themselves less unpopular at home and rally the forces of Argentine chauvinism behind them.

Margaret Thatcher and her government, though their political standing in Britain would improve greatly as a result of the

war, were at that point very unpopular at home too.

On the merits of the issue, right lay with Britain, defending the Falklanders. To recognise that did not imply support for Thatcher's war, and we did not support it: indeed, we ran the slogan "The Enemy is At Home" above the masthead of the weekly paper, Socialist Organiser, throughout the war.

On the other side, nothing but Argentine chauvinism could lead socialists, if they were capable of registering what was happening in the world around them, to support Galtieri's invasion and occupation.

In fact a fantasy "let's pretend" "anti-imperialism" could and did lead many not only (rightly) to oppose Thatcher's war but also (wrongly) positively to back the fascistic Galtieri junta. Many socialists, and not only the "revolutionaries", became honorary Argentine chauvinists for the duration of the war. Why? How?

On the grounds that its opponent was Britain, sections of the left cast Argentina as the hero in a drama that was going on nowhere else except in their own heads. They lost themselves in a delirium of "anti-Imperialist" political fantasising.

The fact that there was nothing "anti-

imperialist" in the Argentine seizure of territory 400 miles from Argentina, inhabited for generations by people who did not want to be part of Argentina and had done Argentina no harm, did not faze them at all. Your "anti-Imperialist", when desperate for a "fix", tends to be impervious to reason and argument.

All the activist left opposed Thatcher's war. Beyond that, the left divided into two groups. That time round the SWP was on the side of sanity and rational politics. Along with "Socialist Organiser" (what is now AWL), it refused to support Argentina, its military rulers, or the occupation of the Falkland islands.

(Militant (now the Socialist Party/

Socialist Appeal) had a bizarre approach all of its own, declaring that the alternative to the war was "a Socialist Federation of Britain, the Falkland Islands, and Argentina".)

The other main group in the left consisted of a large part of the softer Labourite left, around Labour Briefing (The Argentinians were fighting Thatcher, weren't they? What more did we want?); the Mandelite Fourth International, then a sizeable organisation, the International Marxist Group; the Workers Revolutionary Party, crazy as a bed-bug; Workers' Power; and the other half of the organisation to which the tendency which is now AWL then belonged, the Workers' Socialist League.

The pro-Argentine part of the WSL was led by Alan Thornett (now of the ISG).

The story of what happened in the WSL, and how Thornett's section made themselves the pioneers of what today is the "anti-Imperialist" politics of the kitsch-left in Britain, including the SWP, has a lot of light to shed on the current dispute between the "anti-Imperialists" and ourselves.

(Some of the documents of that dispute can be found in *Workers' Liberty* 2/3.)

The WSL of 1982 was the result of the fusion, in July 1981, of the forerunner of the *Alliance for Workers' Liberty*,

Socialist Organiser, and a group that had separated from the WRP seven years earlier, called the WSL. In the fusion, we took the name Socialist Organiser for the joint paper and WSL for the joint organisation.

After nine months, the unification began to break down around the Falklands war. The organisation divided into warring and, as it proved, irreconcilable, factions.

We all agreed on opposing the war, and at the start all of us had rejected positive support for Argentina and declared ourselves in principle for the right of self-determination for the Falkland Islanders.

Six weeks after the British fleet set sail, the Thornett group decided that we should back the Argentine military junta against Britain. Soon they claimed that backing Argentina was a principle of "anti-imperialism".

First, without any prior warning, they tried a small coup, changing our position by a vote of five to three on an Executive Committee whose full membership was 12. After the National Committee majority rejected and overturned that, they started to reconstitute the old WSL and counterpose it to the rest of the organisation.

From then on, the new WSL unravelled, and within it the Thornett section itself

unravelling even faster, scattering their supporters out of the organisation in all directions.

The late Alan Clinton, a Thornetteite who would become Labour Leader of Islington Council some years later, coined what then became the response of the Thornettites to all talk of the rights of the Falkland Islanders: "The Falkland Islanders? They wouldn't populate two streets in Islington!" That disposed of their rights!

They denounced us as "pro-imperialists" because our attitude, "defeatist on both sides" implied that we wanted the fascistic military government of Argentina overthrown by the Argentinian

workers during the war. They insisted it was the duty of "anti-imperialists" to support the Argentinian military forces against Britain, to be "revolutionary defencists" for "anti-imperialist" Argentina and its military dictators.

I responded to their bizarre solicitude for the Argentine military with the statement that I'd be happy to see the whole military apparatus of the Argentine state, whose sole function in history - apart from extirpating the native Amerindian population of the country - has been internal policing, sunk to the bottom of the South Atlantic. They went into shock; and when they came out of it some of them denounced me as "an agent of British imperialism".

We on our side of the common organisation, thought of the Thornettites as hopelessly disoriented people, politically drunk on foolish, self-indulgent fantasy politics; and as people who were shamefully ignorant of the Trotskyist political tradition in which they claimed to stand.

"Revolutionary defencism" for Argentina was political nonsense; but leave that aside. They understood it to mean that socialists should "subordinate" class struggle within Argentina to the potential good effects of an Argentine victory, "even if it strengthens Galtieri", on "the international balance of forces". That had nothing to do with Trotskyist politics

or the Trotskyist tradition.

Trotsky, for instance, being entirely on China's side against the Japanese invaders in the 1930s, advocated a war of national defense. Nonetheless, he advocated a working class revolution against the Chaing Government, during that war.

Their joke-shop, buffoon-fantasy "anti-imperialism" was no harmless bit of inconsequential nonsense, though: it led them to an all too real support of the foul Argentine regime and its mini-imperialism in the Falklands.

Today the biggest forces on the left, in the first place the SWP, have the politics,

or very close to them, that the Thornettites had then. Their "anti-Imperialism" is no less empty.(Alan Thornett can rightly claim to have been the Copernicus of this sort of anti-imperialism", and for all I know, he does!)

They don't just oppose our own government - they back some of the foulest regimes on Earth, on the sole criterion that they oppose the British and US governments.

The SWP's descent into such politics did not start with Iraq. It started with their switch in 1987 to support Iran in the Iran/Iraq war, on the grounds that the USA was backing Iraq. (It had been doing that

for the previous seven years.) Until then, the SWP had opposed the Iran/ Iraq war on both sides.

The SWP's descent from Marxist-socialist politics first reached its present level of political dementia in the Balkans War of 1999. They tried to build an "anti-war movement" in support of a Serbia which was engaged in attempted genocide against the people of its "internal colony", Kosova. Serbia's activity in Kosova was the sole issue in the war, which stopped when the Serb Army withdrew from Kosova.

The SWP learned nothing from that experience. Then came 9/11.

The New Anti-Imperialism identified itself, so to speak, to the kitsch left by Bin Laden's great blows for human liberation in New York and Washington.

There was a new and vigorous "anti-Imperialism loose in the world.

But this was a comprehensively reactionary "anti-Imperialism"? It was not "anti-Imperialism" in any sense in which socialists and consistent liberals are anti-Imperialist? Don't be silly, comrade!

Nothing is or ever could be more reactionary than America, Britain and their allies and stooges. History moves in strange and unexpected ways. The Islamic clerical fascists are against

America, and that's all that matters now.

This was a stark change for the SWP in more ways than one. In the mid-1990s, when Muslims in Bosnia were being butchered, the SWP kept strictly aloof from any hint of supporting them, or denouncing the international arms embargo which hindered them in defending themselves.

They were still remiss in their Islamismophilia during the Balkans war, when they sided with Serbia, which was slaughtering and driving out Muslim Albanians.

Then came 9/11. In the Afghan war the SWP jumped "on board" - and with all

the shamelessness of old-time Stalinists shuffling when their "line" switched.

In the Afghan war, Socialist Worker went so far in "supporting" the enemy of our British and American enemies as to attempt to explain away the horrendous treatment of women by the Taliban regime (Socialist Worker, 6 October 2001).

At the heart of all such thinking is the syndrome where the left defines itself largely in negative terms - by what we are against, not what we are for.

The moral, political and intellectual crisis of the left today takes the form of a comprehensive collapse of positive

norms. But it is cumulative. It has been going on a long time. The Falkland War is now a quarter of a century in the past.

You can trace the present state of the left back to the attitudes which the once-very influential Stalinists, and some of the "orthodox Trotskyists", cultivated towards the USSR and other Stalinist regimes. They were unconditionally on the side of those regimes against "Imperialism", by which they meant the advanced capitalist countries of the west.

I was shocked into the awareness of something qualitatively new during the Balkans war of 1999. We did not support NATO, but we emphatically

refused to do or say anything which implied support for or complaisance towards the primitive ethno-imperialism of the Serbian regime. Serbia had launched a genocidal drive in Kosova which NATO - in its own way, for its own interests, and after over a decade of complaisance towards Serbian imperialism - was attempting to check for the sake of regional stability. (See the dossier on Kosova in *Workers' Liberty* 2/3).

Yet the kitsch-left and in the first place the SWP created a one-sided "anti-war" campaign which in fact was so designed as to give maximum support to Serbian imperialism.

"Anti-war"? The Serbian government could at will have "stopped the war" by withdrawing from Kosova (as eventually they did). If NATO had abandoned its action without Serbia withdrawing, then war would have continued - one-sided war by Serbia against the Kosovars.

The SWP indulged in a fantasy of anti-imperialism as bizarre as, and greatly more irresponsible than, that of poor old Alan Thornett when he passionately championed the anti-imperialism of the murderous Argentine junta in the Falklands war.

Or take another measuring rod. Repeatedly in articles and speeches over many, many years, I have used an

incident in the history of the French Communist Party to illustrate the moral and political degeneracy of Stalinism.

In 1938, the leader of French Stalinism, Maurice Thorez, publicly proposed that the catchment-area of the "Popular Front" should be extended to include "patriotic", that is anti-German, French fascists.

I can still recall how shocked I was when, young and nave, I first read about this.

The PCF never achieved a popular front with patriotic fascists. I have lived to see people who say they stand in Trotsky's political tradition realise something very like it - the SWP's "popular front" in the

"anti-war" movement with the obscurantist authoritarians of the Muslim Brotherhood - MAB - who advocate the creation of Islamic dictatorships all across the Muslim world.

You could quibble that they are not quite fascists, but it would be only a quibble.

They rightly opposed the 2003 war, but did it by lining up squarely with the Saddam Hussein Regime. They used Saddam's long-time British Stooge, George Galloway, as the face and voice of the pro-Saddam "Anti-war" movement.

They have given abject and uncritical support to the Sunni supremacist and

Jihadist "resistance" in Iraq against the bourgeois-democratic - more or less - forces in Iraq.

This "Left", this kitsch-left, is far gone in political corruption, disintegration and decay.

In this situation, the first responsibility of honest socialists is to tell the truth. Describe things as they are. Only in that way can socialists prepare the future.



## Chapter 6: The SWP and the Falklands War

In 1982, the SWP, still retaining bits of the "Third Camp" (independent working-class) political tradition exemplified by the old slogan "Neither Washington nor Moscow, but international socialism", took a roughly similar attitude to the British-Argentine war over the Falkland Islands to that of Socialist Organiser, the forerunner of Solidarity/Workers' Liberty.

The 4 April 2007 Socialist Worker rewrites their position (without saying that it is doing so), the better to square it with their current politics.

In 1982, the SWP was quite clear that there was no anti-colonial issue involved in the war. As Duncan Hallas put it in the May 82 issue of Socialist Review:

"We dismiss the notion that the Argentinian seizure of the Falklands is progressive on anti-colonialist grounds...

"We support anti-colonial movements as movements of struggle by oppressed people against their oppressors and we support them because, as Marx said, 'no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations'.

"None of this has much relevance to the Falklands. There is no Spanish speaking population struggling against British

imperialism. For Galtieri, 'anti-colonialism' is a convenient pretext to divert Argentinian workers away from their struggle against the dictatorship."

This is the 2007 version:

"25 years after the war: Give the Falklands back..."

"Twenty five years ago Socialist Worker refused to defend British ownership of the Falklands and opposed Margaret Thatcher's war to wrest back control from the Argentinians.

"Today taking a clear anti-war position might not seem unusual, but in 1982 we were one of few voices, even on the left,

to oppose Thatcher's war. Tony Blair did criticise the decision to dispatch the task force, but the reaction to his words seems to have made him a fervent convert to the cause of war.

"Twenty five years ago the war in the South Atlantic seemed a throwback to a bygone imperial age. In hindsight it was part of a process where war became more and more central to the global capitalist system.

"The justification for war offered by Thatcher and Labour's then leader Michael Foot compared the Argentinian military regime to Hitler and attacked opponents of war for appeasing fascism. The same arguments have

been paraded for each of the five wars Tony Blair has taken us into since coming to office.

"The Falklands are a colonial possession, seized and re-won by force of arms. They should be returned to Argentina."