

# WORKERS SOCIALIST REVIEW 2

# supplement

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## A change of position

SHORTLY after this magazine went to press, the Workers' Socialist League voted at a Special Conference on Sunday September 5 to change its position on the Falklands/Malvinas war. The position of 'defeatism on both sides' - presented in the main section of the magazine - had previously been agreed by a majority of our National Committee.

At the National Committee on May 16, a motion to change the position to one of 'defend Argentina! no confidence in Galtieri!' was defeated by 20 votes to 16. The National Committee minority formed a tendency on the basis of the positions presented in the NC 'minority tendency' document in the body of the magazine.

Four months of intensive discussion followed, including membership meetings in every area of the movement and the circulation of no less than sixteen internal discussion bulletins dealing with the issue. The July meeting of the National Committee decided to call a special conference.

At the special conference, the full members of the WSL voted 50.6% to 49.4 to change our line to Argentine defensism. Though the closeness of the vote confirms that many of the issues which have arisen in the course of the discussion remain to be further clarified and resolved in the coming months, the conference verdict is accepted by the whole of the WSL and the tendency has been dissolved. The line of the WSL is now that 'defend Argentina' was the correct revolutionary attitude in the Falklands/Malvinas war.

The fact that such a hard-fought debate has been carried through at the same time as continuing our substantial work in the British class struggle is testimony to the fact that a vigorous internal democracy is by no means counterposed to an active intervention by a Marxist organisation in the organised labour movement.

Commitment to our responsibilities in the immediate class struggle is common ground for both viewpoints in the WSL. So was the

### EDITORIAL

WSL's first internationalist duty in the war, to fight against our own ruling class.

We raised the slogan: 'The enemy is at home'. We called for blacking against the war effort. We condemned Britain's war as a war of imperialist authority.

For the debate on Argentina, too, there was common ground.

The NC minority [conference majority] view was that "in calling for a class mobilis-

ation of workers to defend Argentina - and spelling out a related series of transitional and democratic demands designed to mobilise simultaneously against the junta, the bourgeoisie, and the whole officer caste - the minority position offered not support to Galtieri but a means of deepening and radicalising the struggle of the workers diverted by the Malvinas invasion".

The former majority argument is that the war was not about the defence of Argentina but the predatory ambitions of the junta. The first essential of a revolutionary policy in Argentina was patiently to explain that fact - and the necessary conclusion that the war did not serve workers' interests.

In addition some comrades of the former majority believe that some arguments developed by the NC minority tendency contradicted basic Trotskyist class attitudes

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to the bourgeoisies of economically subordinate countries. (But the charge they would make is not one of capitulation, but of confusion!) Conversely, the former minority comrades argued that Trotskyist attitudes demanded a defencist stance, and that the former majority's line would have been sectarian in Argentina, cutting its supporters off from the mass movement.

The common intention of developing the struggle against the junta was however clear.

The dispute has been about HOW TO APPLY the basic Marxist criteria for our attitude in wars.

The former minority argument was that to defend Argentina in a war which began with the "retaking of Argentina of territory stolen by imperialist armed force" was a just war in the Leninist sense. Our opposition to the junta could no more affect that than opposition to Abd-el Krim, to the

Indian bourgeoisie, or to Chiang Kai-shek affected the support of socialists and communists for Morocco against France, India against England, or China against Japan.

The former majority argument was that Argentina's war was not against 'alien oppression' of Argentina by Britain, or the threat of it, but FOR 'alien oppression' of the Falkland Islanders by Argentina. Territorial [i.e. property] claims based on events 150 years ago should have no weight as against the islanders' wishes.

Was Argentina's war objectively a blow against imperialism (even if misled, and initiated as a diversionary manoeuvre); or was it on the contrary irrelevant to the Argentine workers' fight against imperialism? That was the debate.

The dispute was about HOW BEST to fight imperialism, and how best to fight the Argentine military regime, not WHETHER to fight them.

And the decisive common ground is our determination to build a revolutionary party committed to such struggles — a revolutionary party which can argue and debate, even sharply, about many issues, but which is able to decide by majority vote and remain united IN ACTION on the basis of a shared fundamental programme.

An amendment seeking to bring the WSL fully into line with the current position of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (WSR2 p.30), by characterising the Argentine invasion of the islands as "objectively anti-imperialist and historically progressive" despite the junta's reactionary motives, was defeated with ten votes being cast in favour.



# The adopted resolution

THAT THIS Special Conference of the membership changes the present position on the Malvinas which was established by a National Committee majority, and adopts a new policy along the following lines:

The Galtieri junta's invasion of the Malvinas on April 2 was a reactionary invasion. It was not motivated by a legitimate desire to recover from imperialist territory plundered in the past, or to weaken imperialism in the area. In fact it could have resulted in an American base on the islands. The motivation was to bolster the flagging pro-imperialist junta, and contain or reverse the forward movement of the Argentine working class. It was an attempt to resolve the crisis of the Galtieri regime, which had continued chronically since it came to power at the end of 1981, by creating 'national unity' around a popular issue. Irrespective of Argentina's historical claim, we opposed the invasion and Galtieri's motives.

Under these conditions the legitimate Argentine claim to the Falklands is important but not decisive. Part of the Marxist programme is the return of territory plundered by imperialism, but this does not mean we support its recovery irrespective of the motivation of the action or the prevailing political conditions.

As agreed at the outset, the only principled position we could adopt in Britain was one of calling for the defeat of British imperialism. This implied campaigning for the withdrawal of the British fleet and the disruption where possible of the war effort.

Whilst continuing to oppose the Galtieri invasion, our position should have switched to Argentine defencism once Thatcher dispatched the fleet. From that moment it was no longer a 'Falklands issue', but a war of imperialist authority, designed to strengthen world imperialism by regaining its ability to use military force against the oppressed nations of the world when they step out of line. US imperialism, which had initially equivocated, lined up with Britain, recognising that the war could help re-establish the authority of imperialism so crucially weakened since the Vietnam defeat. (The Israeli invasion of the Lebanon is an obvious example of imperialism and its agents taking immediate advantage of the world situation created by Thatcher's war. Now the South African regime is planning to cash in, by planning

the same kind of 'final solution' against SWAPO). It was a war launched by a major imperialist power (Britain) against a nation (Argentina) which is historically, economically and politically a victim of imperialism. Under these conditions, in line with basic Leninist principles, we should have stood for the defence of Argentina, irrespective of the nature of the current regime, whilst maintaining our complete political independence.

Under these conditions, self-determination for the Falklanders — on which the NC majority case rests — does not apply. Why do the Falklanders represent such a freakish phenomenon: a population of a colony who want to remain a part of the empire, in contrast to the multi-millions who have fought for freedom from it? This is because the Falklands are a colonial enclave, part of a system of enclaves which have been used by imperialism in strategic places around the globe to facilitate its military and political domination. They are tied administratively and militarily to the metropolis and usually kept racially and culturally distinct from the region involved.

Although the Falklanders are deeply oppressed themselves by imperialism (their standard of living being very low, and with the imperialist hold on them being through ideology rather than material concessions), they are in fact a part of the imperialist system of control. Having ensured that the people of the colonial enclave want to remain part of the empire, the imperialist answer to any nation which claims the territory back is "the people must decide their own future".

It is therefore simply wrong to say that the Falklanders (or more correctly the Falklands, since the islanders are simply pawns of imperialism) "oppress no-one". Whilst they remain a colony of the British empire they do. The mere existence of imperialist territory off the coast of an oppressed nation is oppressive. It can potentially be used as a major military base at any time, should imperialism so choose (as it has done since the Falklands war ended). It is therefore simply wrong to say that Argentine national rights were not involved; they were.

Inside Argentina, the starting point for our policy should have been the fight for the defeat of the British fleet, while recognising that the conduct of the war was in the hands of a class with very strong links to imperialism; a capitalist class of an

oppressed country, thrown by its own miscalculation into a war with imperialism, yet determined not to break those links.

Our policy should never confuse the objectives of the working class with those of the capitalist class. To assert the independent interests and mobilisation of the Argentine workers required a programme which started out with the struggle to take the conduct of the war out of the hands of the bourgeoisie who in reality did not want to defend Argentina, and place it in the hands of the working class, who did. It meant taking the existing anti-imperialist feelings of the Argentine workers (and it was only possible to be anti-imperialist in any real way while supporting the defence of Argentina) and directing it in a clear anti-capitalist direction: arm the workers; seize the imperialist holdings; refuse to pay debts to the imperialist banks; point to the inability of the junta and the officer caste to conduct the war; demand full trade union and political rights, the release of all political prisoners and the right of rank and file soldiers to organise and to elect their own officers. The struggle to defeat the British task force was therefore also the struggle to defeat Galtieri.

Would a Galtieri victory have strengthened the junta? No. A defeat for British imperialism would have benefited the working class both in Argentina and elsewhere. The junta, as similar juntas, is the local dictator who acts on behalf of imperialism, more or less openly a part of imperialist political control in countries which have gained formal political independence. The junta rests on imperialism. If imperialism is weakened and the oppressed masses encouraged and strengthened on a world scale, so too the basis of the junta is weakened. Thatcher's victory, on the other hand, strengthens the basis for such juntas in the oppressed nations of the world.

The fact that the British victory has been followed by further crisis in the military regime and a renewal of mass struggle by the Argentinian working class is testimony to the strength of that workers' movement and the scale of the crisis which drove Galtieri into the war — not a justification for a defeatist line. Having resorted to populist tactics by launching the war, the discredited generals have proved unable to reassert their previous levels of repression of the workers' movement.

# Why we fought for

WHY — with so many pressing questions demanding attention — did the former minority tendency press for the Malvinas discussion to be taken to a vote at a Special Conference?

In our view this question is one which could only really be asked in Britain, where the world impact of the Malvinas war is not properly recognised.

We have accepted as common ground the fact that the Workers' Socialist League consistently and actively campaigned against the imperialist war effort in the Malvinas — taking up both as a slogan and in practice the concept that 'The enemy is at home'. Our struggles on this line inside the labour movement were second to none on the British left.

But the refusal of the former majority comrades to take a stance in defence of Argentina, taken together with aspects of their analysis presented during the war, meant that the WSL adopted what we saw as a neutral position on the war itself: a position which while the war was in progress we strongly opposed as both misleading to the working class and discrediting for our organisation on a national and international level.

With the exception of the Australian section, our political co-thinkers in the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee had come down for an Argentine defencist position and expressed their concern at what they considered a seriously mistaken policy of the WSL.

There are many issues of substance on which we as part of the TILC want to open up debate with the whole spectrum of other tendencies which regard themselves as Trotskyists, without devoting time and effort to defending a unique WSL position on the Falklands/Malvinas war which many of us regard as wrong. Until that position was changed, the possibility of serious international work was in the view of the old minority severely limited.

## Debate

As the debate advanced within the WSL, however, it was already clear before the war ended that there was no definite majority among the membership for the 'majority' view. On this basis the then minority called for a Special Conference at which a vote could be taken — hopefully to reverse the position, but in any event to get a definitive decision from the membership. As it happened the decision was to overturn the previous position and endorse the 'minority' resolution.

Many of the issues of the discussion are adequately aired in the statement from the then WSL minority reprinted in this magazine (page 26). But some further points should be amplified in the light of the September 5 decision.

The starting point of the minority tendency was the need to distinguish between Argentina, a country oppressed and exploited by imperialism, and Britain — one of the world's most powerful imperialist countries.

We were opposed to the analysis presented by the then majority, who argued that Argentina was not in any significant sense an oppressed nation but rather an advanced capitalist economy of middle rank, functioning as a 'sub-imperialism' in Latin America.

In our view Argentina must be seen in the framework of the international analysis set out by Lenin and the Comintern, and of 'the most important idea' of the Theses on

by John Lister

the National and Colonial Question: "the difference between the oppressed and the oppressor nations".

"Imperialism is characterised by the fact that the whole world is now divided into a large number of oppressed nations and a very small number of oppressor nations that are enormously rich and strong in the military sense. The enormous mass... some 70% of the world's population belong to the oppressed nations which are either in direct colonial dependence, or appear as semi-colonial states like, for example, Persia, Turkey or China, or which, defeated by a great imperialist army, have fallen into marked dependency after the peace treaties".

(Second Congress of the Comintern, Vol. 1, p.110).

Though the period of colonialism has now largely passed, the relationship of oppressed to oppressor nations continues on the basis of the overwhelming economic, military and political domination exercised by the imperialist nations.

Indeed it has been increasingly the power of the Western banks, their monopoly control over the supply of finance capital, and the monopoly on technological expertise in the hands of the imperialist multinational firms which has secured the continued subordination of the 'independent' nations of the so-called 'Third World'. Lenin had pointed to such a development in 'Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism'.

"The world has become divided into a handful of usurer states and a vast majority of debtor states. At the top of the list of foreign investments', says Schulze-Gaevernitz, 'are those placed in politically dependent or allied countries. Great Britain grants loans to Egypt, Japan, China and South America. Her navy plays here the part of bailiff in case of necessity. Great Britain's political power protects her from the indignation of her debtors'."

('Imperialism', p.121).

The form of this domination, and the relative strengths of the imperialist nations — with the economies of Japan and West Germany having emerged to the front rank after their post-war reconstruction by US imperialism — have clearly changed in some respects since Lenin wrote. But the monopoly control of finance capital and the technology required to put it to profitable use remains in the hands of the imperialist nations.

Trotsky's few writings on Latin America at the end of the 1930s all show an acute awareness that while most of the countries of Latin America were already in a formal sense 'independent' capitalist countries in their own right, each of them remained dominated, oppressed and exploited by imperialism, and the struggle for socialism in Latin America was integrally linked with the struggle against imperialism.

In our view these factors were relevant to Argentina in the past and remain relevant today. Despite the partial efforts of Peron's nationalistic regime in the post war period

to isolate the Argentine economy and provide a basis for independent development, the massive indebtedness of Argentina to the imperialist banks, the \$4 billion per year Argentina pays in interest alone on foreign loans, and the foreign domination of the major Argentine firms (80 out of the top 120 are foreign-owned) are testimony to the impossibility of such a break. Argentina remains locked firmly in the tentacles of imperialist oppression, its workers super-exploited to provide profits to fatten the bankers in London in New York as well as the weak and nervous Argentine bourgeoisie.

Politically, too, the regimes which have ruled Argentina reflect the oppressed character of this country. Balancing uneasily between the demands of imperialism on the one hand and the strength of a militant working class on the other, Peron and his successors have vacillated between populism and brute repression, with no substantial 'national' bourgeoisie to provide a stable basis for 'democratic' rule. The hand of the imperialist multinationals and the CIA could be seen behind the Pinochet coup in Chile in 1973, and there is no doubt that the US imperialists urged on and assisted the Videla coup in Argentina in 1976 as the best means of securing conditions for further exploitation.

To point to the formal 'independence' of Argentina, its relatively high level of capitalist development, or the absence of a substantial Argentine peasantry as grounds for rejecting the analysis of Argentina as an oppressed, exploited nation seems to us to substitute the superficial for the essential. Trotsky pointed out the extremely wide variety of economies among the backward countries:

"Colonial and semi-colonial countries differ extraordinarily from one another in their degree of backwardness... reaching from nomadry up to the most modern industrial culture... With their common economic dependence on the imperialist metropolises their political dependence bears in some instances the character of open colonial slavery (India, Equatorial Africa) while in others it is concealed by the fiction of state independence (China, Latin America)".

The 'dual defeatist' position denies that the Malvinas war could be seen as a struggle of an oppressed nation against oppression. And it denies that the mobilisations in Argentina in support of the war had a progressive anti-imperialist character.

This is linked with an unequivocal rejection of the Argentine claim to the Malvinas.

In reality the British 'claim' to the islands has rested from 1833 onwards on nothing other than superior military force. British civil servants and government spokesmen have realised this and avoided arguing the case, seeking instead to rely upon arguing the 'self-determination' of the islanders, and forcing Argentina to make the first aggressive move to reclaim the territory stolen from it.

The argument of 'self-determination' was used by the former WSL majority as a cornerstone of their rejection of Argentina's claim, their condemnation of the Argentine invasion, and their refusal to take a defencist stance for Argentina.

They argue that self-determination for a distinct community like the Falklanders is a basic democratic demand. It can be rejected only if more important considerations over-

# a change of line



ride it — if, for example, self-determination for the islanders would be a weapon for British subjugation of Argentina, and thus clashed with the basic democratic rights of the Argentine people. That, they argue, was not the case.

Also, for this community as for all others, the issues of whether the community chooses to be independent or to adhere to another state, and the economic prospects for an independent state, are irrelevant to the democratic principle of self-determination.

In our view the slogan of self-determination for the Falklanders is irrelevant and misleading. The islanders are plainly not a nation, and the make-up of their community is determined primarily by the employment requirements of Coalite Ltd, which controls 45% of the land, the tied housing, and the wool trade which is the backbone of the primitive economy of the islands.

The islanders — whether as community or nation — are not seeking independence or secession from the colonial power, Britain. Their declared wish to adhere to Britain can only be sustained in the long term by the same means which have for 150 years preserved the islands as a British colony against the wishes of the Argentine and Latin American people — imperialist military force, possibly coupled with economic reforms and subsidies along the lines of the Shackleton report.

Were it not for their hostility to the nearby Argentine people — hostility stoked up by 150 years of exclusion of Latin American people from the Falklands, by imperialist propaganda, and most recently by the Argentine invasion — the most obvious and progressive solution would be for the islanders to develop strengthened links with the Argentine people and economy, fighting for full rights as a self-governing part of Argentina.

Instead they remain as an isolated and backward colonial enclave, cut off from any serious hope of social or economic development as anything other than a major imperialist military base in the South Atlantic, downtrodden appendages of a country 8,000 miles away.

The expansion of this military base is itself a threat to the peoples of Latin America, a possible weapon in the hands of British — and US — imperialism in any future conflict in the region.

To endorse the slogan of 'self-determination' for the islanders is thus in our view unacceptable politically, economically and historically: and unwittingly plays into the hands of the imperialist propaganda machine.

Equally mistaken in our view is the attitude of the former majority to the question of the struggle in Argentina itself.

We opposed the Galtieri invasion as reactionary because its objective — to a large

degree at first successful — was to divert and halt the mass struggle of the Argentine workers against the junta. The Malvinas invasion was never intended by the junta as a serious challenge to imperialism.

But when Thatcher went to war to reclaim the Malvinas for British imperialism, the situation changed. An imperialist nation was waging an offensive struggle against an oppressed nation. Its objective — to reimpose the 'unequal treaty' whereby the Malvinas remain in British hands, and in so doing to reassert imperialist power in the eyes of the working classes of the world.

We had a duty not only to oppose the British war effort (which we did) but to offer a policy to rally the Argentine workers to the struggle against imperialism. With a mass movement already on the streets, it was necessary to put forward transitional demands which would link to their anti-imperialist sentiments and mobilise working class action simultaneously against the real bulwarks of imperialism — the banks and multinationals on the one hand, and the pro-imperialist Galtieri junta on the other.

Under the slogan of defence of Argentina, we should have advocated demands for the arming of working class detachments, for the right of rank and file soldiers to organise and to elect their own officers, for the release of all political prisoners, freedom of trade unions and political parties, and a struggle on all fronts against the Galtieri regime which had no intention of seriously fighting its imperialist sponsors.

Such struggles would provide a clear basis for the exposure of the 'nationalist' bourgeois parties and leaders, and of the demagoguery of the junta, without in any way subordinating the interests of the working class to Galtieri.

We have consistently argued that defence of Argentina by no means implies seeing anything progressive in the junta or the Argentine bourgeoisie: but the Argentine working class needs to fight the junta on the basis of a genuinely independent policy, not on the basis of automatically calling for 'defeat' where the junta calls for 'victory'.

In the article 'Learn to Think', reprinted in this magazine (p.13), Trotsky insists that:

"The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign — this would make every sectarian a master strategist".

Indeed the former majority position of defeatism for Argentina is in our view sectarian both in its relationship to the Argentine masses and in its rejection of the combined tasks of the Argentine revolution. In our view the anti-capitalist struggle in Argentina must be coupled with the fight against imperialism. The struggle could best be developed by taking the war as a starting point and arguing to transform it into a real offensive against the multinationals, the banks, and the junta. In this way we could best intervene in the mass demonstrations and offer an independent line.

But the former majority argued that the mobilisations in support of the war represented a chauvinist channelling of the workers by the Peronist mis-leadership, and that a real anti-imperialist struggle could be developed only by combining calls for the seizure of the factories, arming of the workers, etc., with opposition to the war.

Finally, the former WSL majority's criticisms of the 'defencist' policy artificially limit the world importance and impact of

the Falklands war itself. They argue that the effect of the war on the international balance of forces was dubious, and in any case that our position should be based not on calculations of such effects but on the direct issues of the war itself.

In our view, the willingness and ability of British imperialism to send a huge fleet halfway around the world and inflict a military defeat upon the army of an oppressed nation is a major break from the predominant attitude of imperialism since the defeat of the USA in Vietnam. Such a change must have an impact upon the thinking of militants in struggle against imperialist-backed regimes — and upon those regimes themselves.

Before the Malvinas war was even ended,

# The defeated resolution

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 the fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Where wars under bourgeois leadership are about no such progressive cause, class-struggle politics demand a defeatist stance — i.e. denunciation of the war, continuation of the class struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie while clearly accepting that this will make defeat more likely in the war.

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 disrupt the international unity of the working class, setting one national section to slaughter another, casually or 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".

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 genuinely anti-imperialist workers' government in Argentina.

Begin — openly quoting Thatcher's use of armed force as his excuse — had ordered the invasion of Southern Lebanon. The apartheid regime in South Africa will also have noted the arguments well, and drawn strength from the British brutality, in its bloody repression of SWAPO and interventions into Angola and Mozambique.

We cannot of course say that such actions will take place simply because of the Malvinas war, or would not have happened without it: but we can say that Thatcher's successful expedition will lend confidence to the forces of reaction and to a degree intimidate the forces of revolution on a world scale. Thus the fight to defend Argentina against British imperialism by revolutionary proletarian means was at the same

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

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.

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

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 a desire by them 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

time a fight to strengthen the struggle of the proletariat internationally. It is in this respect — and this alone — that the defence of capitalist Argentina against imperialist Britain would strengthen the forces of our class, the proletariat, around the world.

It is the struggle for the development of the political independence and fighting strength of the working class on a world scale which unites the two tendencies within the WSL. In what remains an important discussion, each side is seeking the best means to achieve that end. By taking such questions seriously and attempting to hammer out a coherent world view, we are coming to grips with some long-unresolved problems of the Trotskyist movement in the post-war period

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 any 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.

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 pacifist 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, WSR2 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.

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 the US imperialists. 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 2. 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.

In the war over the (maybe strategically important) Falkland Islands there was no conflict over military bases or possible future military bases of a character to give socialists the option or the duty to favour one of the contestants.

Argentina and Britain are in the same imperialist camp. Britain was literally within months of scrapping the naval apparatus that made the re-invasion of the Falklands possible. (But because of the internal crisis in Argentina the junta could not wait).

On the other hand, the Argentine junta had been negotiating with the USA, South Africa, and Britain to set up a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation to police the region (as Argentina helped to police El Salvador by sending troops). The expert commentators are largely agreed that this would have led to US bases on the Falklands.

That is, had Argentina got hold of the Falklands without falling out with US imperialism, it would have speeded up the work of replacing the decrepit and militarily insignificant British imperialist presence with a military presence of the dominant imperialist power.

The Falklands are maybe strategically important; but neither side in the war would have taken them away from imperialism. Argentina is part of the imperialist system; its war with Britain did not place it outside that system.

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-a-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.

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 by victory politically and in its prestige. But these gains may well prove shallow and temporary (indeed, the continued class

struggle has already proved them shallow and temporary), and the British bourgeoisie has gained nothing material — like new military strength, new spheres of influence, or new possessions.

The Argentine regime, on the other hand, has certainly been weakened by defeat. This 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.

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.

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 a 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 2).

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.

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.

present-day colonial enclaves (Gibraltar, Hong Kong, the many small French colonies, Ceuta, Melilla, etc.) fit the picture painted. At best it is an attempt to slot the Falklands anachronistically into the role of the colonial enclaves in China in the earlier part of this century.

The crisis that the WSL has lived through is, in our view, inseparable from the crisis of the large 'family of Trotskyism' — that is, the large mass of particles which eclectically combine 'Trotskyist' dogmas with elements of third worldism, anarchism, Maoism, &c. The crisis is of terminal proportions for sections of the movement, such as the SWP-USA. We comment on this in the body of the magazine.

Also, the 'defeatism on both sides' position put the WSL at loggerheads with the broad forces of the labour movement Left — reformist in politics and often tinged with Stalinism — which drew pro-Argentine conclusions more or less mechanically from hatred of the British government and from phillistine acceptance of British victory or Argentine victory as the only alternatives (i.e. rejection of working class action to defeat both governments as 'Trotskyist utopianism').

The WSL is a fusion of two organisations united in July 1981. The fusion is a bold experiment in seeking to create an organisation free from sectarian monolithism, within which different traditions can coexist among people bound together by extensive agreement about what must be done now in the class struggle. The different traditions exist still, and inevitably so.

The WSL initially made a more or less united response to the war. To maintain that course when it put us at odds with the majority of the 'world Trotskyist movement' and the British Left, more political agreement and cohesion would have been necessary than in fact was found to exist.

One component of the fusion — the ICL — had described Argentina as follows in its 1977 Manifesto: "More recently capitalism has begun to move highly developed industry into some of the more advanced and stable countries, particularly in Asia and Latin America (e.g. Iran, Taiwan, Brazil, partly Argentina), building them up as policemen in their respective areas. With their proximity to unsaturated markets for high-technology goods, their low labour costs and their military repression of the labour movement, they form a rich field for the activity of the imperialist multinationals".

This — like many other detailed points — was not discussed in the fusion process, and it was not until the Falklands war that we found it was contentious.

But crises such as that around the Falklands war are probably inevitable. The point is that the WSL still exists. The tremendously valuable work that the WSL does (and continued to do during the discussion) is not inevitable, but an achievement won by the determination of those on both sides of the divide not to let this or other disputes disrupt that work. Given the normally split-prone nature of left organisations, that is no small achievement. Both sides in the dispute are committed to sustaining and developing that achievement.

## AFTER THE CONFERENCE

by Jackie Cleary, John Hill, and Chris Reynolds

THE DEFEATED resolution, which is printed in this supplement, deals more or less comprehensively from our point of view with the issues and arguments that arose in the WSL's discussion of the war over the Falkland islands. What remains to be done here is to assess the dispute and where the near-tied vote of the special conference leaves the WSL.

A majority of 1.2% on the third count cannot be regarded as a satisfactory outcome from any point of view, though indisputably in formal terms it establishes a new majority position.

If the special conference had been held during the war, then the implications of the vote would be clear. In fact, however, with the war 2½ months into history when the conference was held, its work could only be to assess and pass judgment on the WSL's performance during the British-Argentine war.

The verdict of the special conference was implicitly that the WSL was very seriously deficient. For if the revolutionary axiom that we side with the oppressed against the oppressors had application to the British/Argentine war, then our refusal to support Argentina was no small fault. It was a grievous error at best; it was a betrayal of communist principles at worst, an example of the politics which Trotsky at the Second Congress of the Communist International insisted should be "branded with infamy if not with a bullet".

One should not mince words on serious questions, and there are few questions more serious for an honest revolutionary organisation than the assessment of its own performance in major events and important crises.

Those whose political principles and assessments guided the WSL during the British/Argentine war reject any such condemnation. In our view, any other position than the WSL's during the war (however good its anti-imperialist intentions) to one degree or another lent credence to the irrelevant Falklands adventure of the Argentine bourgeois state.

The division in the WSL ceased to be a matter of current politics when the war ended in mid-June: it became a matter of a historical assessment of an episode in the history of the organisation. In our view it would have been far better to leave it until passions had cooled.

Given the line-up in the leadership of the WSL, it was a near certainty that the special conference would not produce an authoritative verdict on our recent history. We said it would at best be perhaps a matter of an inadequate few votes majority on either side. Therefore most of the NC majority supporters were against the special conference — though we accepted that the NC minority had a democratic right to have such a conference called, and did not vote against calling it.

We held a position during the war decided by a 11% majority of the NC; after four months intensive and unavoidably inward-turned discussion, we have exchanged it for a self-condemnatory verdict on our recent history on the authority of 1.2% of the conference vote.

Short of an overwhelming majority, a conference vote on such a question could anyway have little meaning other than a sectional one. Of course we accept that the conference vote establishes a new WSL position. It deter-

mines, for example, how the WSL votes in such forums as the TLIC, and would determine our attitude in the (unlikely) event of a new British/Argentine war over the Falklands. But the narrowness of the vote means that it gives no authority to the implications of condemning the WSL's record. A vote to condemn the organisation in the war disputed by about half the membership cannot have the weight that the former minority hoped for.

From the start we thought that the call for a special conference was a serious political error by the leaders of the minority, and in our view the outcome confirms this.

All the more was it so in that the minority leaders only raised the call for a special conference 3½ weeks after the war had ended. Most of them had themselves held the two-way defeatist position for the first five weeks after April 2. Thereafter they had a number of intermediate positions to back up the idea that we should support Argentina. The final pro-Argentine position in the special conference resolution is substantially different from the one in the May 20 document reprinted in the body of this magazine.

This is one of the least satisfactory aspects of the discussion in the WSL. Given that the living political issue had receded into history, the discussion in the WSL inevitably dealt with issues like the analysis of imperialism today and the Marxist teaching on self-determination for nations and fragments of nations. But the framework of a special conference where the key question posed was whether the organisation should condemn itself or not, is the worst possible to discuss such questions with coolness and objectivity.

An example (in our view) of what results from discussing serious questions in this way is the strange 'theory of enclaves' appearing in the resolution carried by conference. According to this theory, imperialist world domination depends on a string of colonial enclaves, of which the Falklands are an example. As far as we know, no Marxist account of the economic and military mechanisms of imperialism today supports this theory; and none of the

