



MALVINAS
are
ARGENTINA'S

40p

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Taking sides against imperialism

Malvinas are Argentina's

MANY people in Britain are uneasy about the war against Argentina. Many sense that there is more to this conflict than concern with the 1800 British inhabitants of the Malvinas. Others know that the launching of a war on behalf of 'principles' like freedom and democracy by the Thatcher Government is only a justification for powerful interests. And yet only a few are prepared to take sides against British imperialism. There are a number of reasons for this.

Many are hostile to Britain's use of military force. But they cannot bring themselves to support a regime they see as reactionary and repressive. Again, many recognise the justice of Argentina's claim to the Malvinas: but they go along with the argument that the rights of the Falklanders should be defended.

In this pamphlet we examine the relationship between Britain and Argentina, to show why the character of the regime in Buenos Aires is irrelevant to our support for a country dominated by imperialism against an imperialist power like Britain. We look at the way Britain cynically invokes the rights to national self-determination of the Falklanders to deny the democratic rights of the Argentine people. And we explain why people who profess to be anti-war, socialists, even internationalists, are pointing the finger at Argentina.



Argentine 'fascism'~an old lie

EVERY Labour MP agrees that Argentina is governed by a fascist military junta guilty of unprovoked aggression against Britain. Even left-wing critics of Thatcher's decision to despatch the fleet echo her condemnations of the totalitarian regime in Buenos Aires. From the far right to the extreme left British politicians identify Argentine fascism as the problem.

The myth of Argentine fascism has a long history. It dates back to the 'thirties when Argentina attempted to strike out on its own regardless of the consequences for its imperialist masters. Argentina's move towards a limited degree of economic independence during the Second World War was bitterly resented by Britain and the USA. The Allies labelled successive Argentine governments 'fascist', inventing tales of pro-Nazi subversion to justify the imposition of diplomatic and economic sanctions to restrict its independent objectives. Every gesture made by Argentina to break the stranglehold of the imperialist powers over its economy has been represented in Britain and America as a resurgence of 'fascism', a grievous threat not only to their own interests, but also to the best interests of the Argentine people.

Before we look further at the 'fascist Argentina' myth and its importance in the British labour movement it is useful to examine more closely the relationship between Britain and Argentina. This is vital to challenge the misconception that because Argentina is relatively highly industrialised it can be represented as an equal rival of Britain.

Argentina Britannica

Argentina was never a British colony. It became an independent country in 1816 when it took over territories, including the Malvinas, formerly ruled by Spain. Britain attempted, unsuccessfully, to colonise Argentina, but it managed to seize the Malvinas in 1833. However, although Argentina retained its formal independence, Britain's economic power in the region ensured that the country developed under British control.

British domination over Argentina was guaranteed by an alliance between British industrialists and Argentine landowners. A pro-British military and administrative clique controlled the state in Buenos Aires. British manufacturers built the railways and supplied the refrigerated transport for shipping wheat, meat and other agricultural products to Britain. The ranchers bought manufactured goods from Britain; the Buenos Aires oligarchy promoted the free movement of British products and capital to the detriment of any indigenous industry; and Britain got a steady supply of food-stuffs at prices fixed on the London commodity markets.

The British-backed state authorities responded decisively to any threat to imperialist control. In the late nineteenth century this came from the development of capitalist industry in Paraguay. A task force financed by Britain and recruited from Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil invaded and slaughtered 80 per cent of the adult male population. That was the end of local competition. By the end of the first decade of this century Britain held 47 per cent of foreign private investment and 75 per cent of Latin America's public debt.

In the early part of this century an emergent working class movement, made up largely of poor immigrants from Europe, challenged the capitalist order in Argentina. A group of British industrialists and bankers sponsored the paramilitary Patriotic League which launched a wave of pogroms on working class ghettos. In the 'semana tragica' in 1919 several hundred workers were massacred. British business could thrive as stable 'industrial relations' were restored.

Britain's hold over the Argentine economy continued up to the 'thirties. A corrupt and repressive military dictatorship helped Britain to compensate for its declining position in the world by stepping up its plunder of Argentina. The Roca-Runciman Treaty of 1933 ratified the subordination of the Argentine economy to British demands for meat and grain. In the 'forties, however, Britain was supplanted as the dominant power in Argentina by the USA. The USA took advantage of Britain's difficulties in the Second World War to strengthen its own position in Latin America. Under the Lend Lease Act of 1941 the USA supplied Britain with vital raw materials — on condition that it did not use these to manufacture exports to compete with American companies in key areas, in particular in Latin America, and especially in

Argentina. The Americans had their old rivals in Europe over a barrel – but although Britain could not prevent the USA squeezing it out of South American markets, it could still rip off Argentina. Britain used its still considerable influence in the region to encourage Argentina to build up its reserves during the war in sterling – even though it was outside the Sterling Area. Once the war was over, Britain reclaimed the bulk of Argentina's sterling – as handsome compensation for the nationalisation of the British-owned railways, which had anyway become an obsolete liability for Britain. (See RS Sayers, *Financial Policy 1939-45*, HMSO, 1951.) The USA had pushed Britain into second place by the end of the war, but Argentina's subordination to the world economy continued, determining the pattern of its post-war development.

Argentine zig-zag

In the post-war period the ruling regime in Argentina has vacillated between pursuing a course of independent capitalist development and accepting a more subordinate relationship to imperialism.

In the 'thirties the depression forced Argentina to cut down on its imports. The lack of sufficient foreign exchange encouraged local industry to produce goods it could not afford to buy from abroad. The outbreak of the Second World War eased the grip of imperialism on Argentina and gave the local capitalist class scope to industrialise. This industrialisation received a major boost from rearmament and the world-wide demand for food and raw materials during post-war reconstruction and the Korean War. While the imperialists were at each others' throats Argentina, led by Juan Peron, launched an ambitious programme of economic nationalism.

Peron's independent course

Peron was the most astute of a clique of soldiers who seized power from the incompetent and reactionary Castillo regime in 1943. He was elected President with an overwhelming popular mandate in 1946. The hallmark of his regime was its hostility to foreign control over the Argentine economy and its promotion of national independence through protectionism and the nationalisation of key sectors of the economy.

Peron ruled in face of the hostility of the foreign investors, the big landowners and their sympathisers in the armed forces and the Church. The national bourgeoisie, which benefited most from the development of industry, was itself a weak social force, incapable of challenging the pro-imperialist oligarchy. The key to Peron's success lay in his mobilisation of the working class, by 1945 already the biggest in South America. Peron took advantage of the ethnic and political divisions among the workers and the ideological backwardness of a proletariat largely newly-formed from the land. A combination of concessions in the form of higher wages, social welfare



measures and trade union recognition, combined with populist demagoguery, ensured a powerful mass base for Peron among the 'descamisados' (the 'shirtless ones'). Thus poised like a Bonaparte above the class struggle, Peron steered Argentina along a course of capitalist development with an unprecedented degree of freedom from imperialist control. As long as the imperialist powers were busy fighting each other or recovering from the war, Peron had considerable room to manoeuvre.

By the early 'fifties imperialism was ready to close in on Argentina. To pursue the path of independent economic development required an uncompromising struggle against imperialism and a decisive showdown with big landowners and their civilian and military allies. This Peron was incapable of doing. He feared the consequences of unleashing the anti-imperialist potential of the masses. Mass mobilisation of the working class would have represented a threat to capitalism itself. Instead, Peron tried another option. When commodity prices began to fall in the early 'fifties, Peron turned to American, German and Italian capitalists for help. In return for foreign investment Peron was prepared to discipline the mass movement. Wages, which had risen steadily in the late 'forties, were now forced down: when workers went on strike the regime moved in and crushed them.

But it was too little too late. As far as foreign capital was concerned Peron had gone too far. Argentina had to be taught a lesson it would never forget. Peron, isolated from his mass support, became easy prey to an imperialist-backed coup in 1955.

Rather than rally the working class for a genuine anti-imperialist struggle, Peron fled the country, finally taking refuge in Spain. The fact that he fell at the hands of the CIA and its local agents had important long-term consequences: Peron's compromised relationship to imperialism was never exposed — indeed he appeared as its victim — and he retained considerable influence in the labour movement for the next 20 years.

Back in line

The demise of Peron led to a period of almost two decades in which his independent strategy was replaced by a much more servile posture towards the imperialist powers. The world markets were not so consistently favourable as they had been in the Peron years and periodic crises shook the Argentine economy. A series of regimes, more or less directly sponsored by the armed forces, prevented the appropriation of agricultural surpluses for industrial investment and instead encouraged the influx of foreign capital, particularly into the previously neglected capital goods sector. The setbacks inflicted on the working class at the close of the Peron regime contributed to the stabilisation of the Argentine economy under more direct imperialist control. The result was an average annual growth rate through the 'sixties of around six per cent; the proportion of industrial production in foreign hands grew from eight to 40 per cent between 1955 and 1972.

The working class, however, was never decisively defeated. Its trade union organisations — largely under Peronist influence — remained strong. In the late 'sixties the conditions of austerity and repression under President Juan Carlos Onganía — the most pro-imperialist and most successful of all the post-Peron dictators — provoked a massive upsurge of working class militancy. In 1969 the military authorities suppressed a virtual insurrection in the provincial city of Córdoba in two days of ferocious street fighting. Continuing economic disruption, strikes and political instability racked the country for the next three years.

By 1973, with the world economy lurching into a major recession, the Argentine ruling class was in desperate straits. Onganía and his successors had pampered the big ranchers, courted foreign investors, promoted exports and squeezed domestic consumption. But they could not contain an increasingly militant working class, or deal with the growing threat from bands of rural and urban guerrillas. The only viable option seemed to be to turn the country over to the only man who could contain the masses: Peron.

Peron's return

Peron's economic nationalism had achieved a certain success in the favourable circumstances of the 'forties: in the crisis of the 'seventies it was a non-starter. His support now came from industrialists and entrepreneurs closely tied to foreign capital; unlike the indigenous capitalists who backed Peron in his first term, they had no interest in challenging imperialism. They welcomed back Peron as a President who could integrate a skilled and articulate working class into the operation of a modern capitalist economy under tight imperialist control. But the Peronist trade union bureaucracy could no longer deliver the rank and file, increasingly out of its control in the militant 'coordinadora'. The result was chaos.

The crisis gave Peron no room to manoeuvre with imperialism and no leeway for concessions to the working class. Repression began at the moment of his triumphal return when right-wing assassination squads began a campaign of systematic terror against the radical Peronist youth, trade union militants and left-wing activists. Peron's attempts to win wage restraint collapsed in the face of spiralling inflation. After Peron's death a year later and his succession by his widow the chaos deepened. Inflation went into three figures, wages dropped and the terror conducted by the right and the state forces was met by growing forces of left-wing guerrillas.

Back to heel

The attempt at a stabilising operation under Peron was a disaster for the Argentine ruling class and its backers abroad. The 1976 coup that installed the present military junta was their answer. The Generals and their civilian advisors removed the last vestiges of protection for Argentine industry and laid the country wide open to foreign investors. Denationalisation of key sectors of the economy was accompanied by tight monetary policies designed to enforce harsh austerity conditions on Argentine workers. The state terror that has prevailed as long as imperialist domination in Argentina and had reached a new peak of intensity in the final Peronist years, was now applied more ruthlessly and more systematically than ever before. The guerrilla groups were annihilated, all political and trade union organisations outlawed and thousands imprisoned, tortured and murdered.



The present junta — in which Galtieri took power last December, following Viola who succeeded Videla in March 1981 — has been the most popular of all Argentine regimes since the Second World War with the USA, Britain and the EEC countries. But, although investment has poured in and every Western creditor has lent vast sums of money, Argentina has been unable to escape the catastrophic impact of the world recession. The twin policies of the regime — austerity and terror — have endeared it to Western capitalists, but not to the Argentine masses. A still powerful working class movement has revived to challenge the dictatorship. Galtieri's seizure of the Malvinas was a desperate ploy to buy time for his regime. He hoped to defuse opposition to the government by mobilising the masses around the national flag. But he seriously underestimated the likely response from the imperialist powers to this Peron-style gesture from a strictly anti-Peronist military regime.

Keeping a grip

The primary concern of Britain and the USA in Latin America is maintaining political stability in the region so that the business of imperialist exploitation can continue undisturbed. However, as a result of the extremes of poverty and oppression that are inseparable features of imperialist domination in South America, political stability is not easily achieved. For the most part, the imperialist order has been enforced throughout the subcontinent through the suppression of political parties, trade unions, a free press and other features of bourgeois democracy. Military dictatorship is the norm: arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture and murder its customary means of keeping in control.

Bourgeois policy

London and Washington have generally given their blessing to the more explicitly pro-imperialist military dictators in Argentina. They welcomed the fall of Peron in 1955 and the Videla coup of 1976. These regimes have fully accepted their subordinate position; they have cooperated totally in the plunder of the resources of the country, while ensuring stability through repression. On the other hand, the imperialist powers have been hostile to Peronist attempts to seek an independent path of development. They particularly distrusted the way in which Peron had mobilised the masses to support his challenge to foreign domination over the economy, rightly perceiving a potential threat to imperialism throughout the area. Their response has been a strident anti-Peronism, the equation of his populist nationalism with fascism and the deployment of a barrage of propaganda and of diplomatic, economic and ultimately covert military measures against him and his supporters.

Two qualifications to this overall picture are necessary to explain fully the subtleties of imperialist policy in Latin America. First, Western backing for pro-imperialist

military dictatorships has always been tempered by an awareness that the intense poverty, the gross inequalities and the vicious repression that prevail under such regimes tend to provoke resistance and rebellion. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress and Carter's Human Rights policy both attempted to tie US investment to attempts to stabilise imperialist control through the promotion of democratic reforms and measures to alleviate extremes of oppression. The harsh realities of imperial profit-making dictated severe limitations on the implementation of this approach. In Argentina in the 'sixties, and even more so in the 'seventies, there was no alternative to terror.

Second, the imperialist powers' antipathy to Peron was always qualified by their recognition of his capacity to reconcile Argentina's volatile opposing class forces and his pursuit, behind his populist rhetoric, of a sound bourgeois economic policy. Even in Peron's first term, while businessmen in London and New York ranted about his takeover of the railway network and his tariffs on foreign imports, their capital still found its way into Argentine investment outlets. In 1973 the imperialist world joined, somewhat apprehensively, the Argentine ruling class in welcoming back Peron as the only man who could restore capitalist law and order in the country.

The labour movement's response

Every regime in Latin America that attempted to curb imperialist domination this century has been denounced as 'anti-democratic', 'dictatorial' or 'fascist'. The fact that Argentina refused to be drawn into the Second World War, declared its neutrality and tried to play off one group of imperialists against another was seized upon by the US and British ruling classes as proof of its pro-Nazi orientation.

The British labour movement, led by its reformist leaders and the Stalinist Communist Party, took little time to launch a vicious campaign against Peron. A series of articles by Ann Kelly in the Communist Party-controlled *Labour Monthly* in 1944 was typical of this pro-imperialist venom:

'Argentina's "New Christian Order" is the new type of Fascism which represents not only the greatest domestic menace to Latin American labour and democracy, but also a focal point of infection for the rest of the Americas.' (May 1944)

Peron's alleged slavish devotion to Catholicism was a recurrent theme of the Stalinist propaganda machine in this period: ironically, a decade later, he was the first Catholic head of state ever to be excommunicated by the Vatican.

The real crime of Argentina was its refusal to support British imperialism during the war. This is made clear in Kelly's denunciation of Argentina's foreign policy:

'In external politics the aim of the "New Christian Order" is to collaborate fully with Franco's Spain and form a Latin bloc which will involve Hispano-America in a struggle against the democ-

ratio ideas of Britain and the US. What must be stressed here is that whilst the inspiration derives from Franco, the direction comes from Berlin.'

Kelly substantiated this spirited defence of Anglo-American interests with lurid stories of Nazi plots by German agents from Buenos Aires.

Kelly concluded her series with the exhortation that 'the British Labour Movement must be vigilant to ensure that British foreign policy crystallises much more decisively in support of the democratic forces in Argentina' (August 1944). By this she meant support for the *pro-imperialist* forces working for the overthrow of Peron's regime. Peron won one of the few free elections ever held in Argentina by an overwhelming majority a few months later.

Another Stalinist periodical *World News and Views* congratulated Tory Prime Minister 'Mr Churchill' on a speech in the House of Commons in February 1944 in which he uttered some 'sharp and well merited words of criticism' of the policy of Argentina. This 'dictatorial', 'pro-Nazi' regime was condemned as 'a menace to all the United Nations':

'We in this country cannot regard it as a distant menace, nor one of slight importance. Dictatorship in the Argentine threatens not only the freedom of its inhabitants but the stability and progress of the whole of South America and provides a base from which Nazi and Falange agents can operate over a wide area.' (12 August)

All was not lost however. The CP's hope for 'stability and progress' in South America lay in the 'good neighbour policy' of the USA. This front for US imperialist intervention was portrayed as the agency for the 'development of a peaceful, progressive and democratic Latin America'. The CP took some comfort in the fact that 'now Mr Churchill has lined British policy up with that of the US' and imposed sanctions against Argentina.

Tribune was not so sure. It was not that the Labour left was soft on Argentina's challenge to British imperialism: it too joined the chorus of 'fascist' name-calling. It even denounced Roosevelt and Churchill for recognising the new regime (6 August 1943). But it was suspicious of American intentions, noting that they had been 'trying hard to oust Argentine Governments of whatever shading so long as these remained oriented towards Europe rather than North America' (4 August 1944). *Tribune* had no objection to imperialist interventions in principle: 'we are all in favour of interventionist foreign policies designed to back democratic and pacific elements in every country'. For 'democratic and pacific elements' read 'British interests'.

Nor did *Tribune* object to military interference — even by the USA — in Latin America. Observing that 'Argentina presents the most dangerous threat to the future of democracy in South America', John W White reminded the regime what happened to one of its neighbours when it tried to cut loose from imperialist control:

'The threat in little Uruguay became so serious that a US squadron was sent to Montevideo and Admiral Ingram announced to the world that Washington was prepared to defend its friends anywhere against totalitarian aggression.' (18 August 1944)

Thus White drew out the inescapable logic of the left's position. By characterising as 'fascist' Latin American regimes that mobilised popular support to strengthen their limited challenge to imperialism, the labour movement echoed the propaganda of the imperialists and became, if anything, even more outspoken than the bourgeoisie in calling for imperialist intervention.

The return of 'fascism'

Now General Galtieri and his junta have taken the place of Peron and his clique as the 'tin-pot fascist dictators' censured from across the British political spectrum. Detailed exposures of the atrocities of terror and repression conducted by the present regime in Argentina fill the pages of the mass media and the left press. Forty years ago similar publications carried sensational stories of Nazi plots, concentration camps and 'Gestapo techniques' (see 'Torture in Argentina', *Labour Monthly*, June 1945; 'Repression in the Argentine', *World News and Views*, 3 April 1943; 'Argentina's political jungle', *Tribune*, 11 June 1943).

In reality Argentina has never been ruled by a fascist dictatorship. As we have seen, it has alternated since the 'thirties between two distinct forms of bourgeois rule — Bonapartism and military dictatorship. Fascism as a form of capitalist rule rests on a mass petit-bourgeois base which is mobilised into an organisation to destroy the trade unions and political parties of the working class. As a result of its particular path of development, Argentina has never had a substantial petit bourgeoisie, rural or urban. Peron's mass base was proletarian and when he turned against it he had to rely on the army, not his political organisation, to do his dirty work. The present military dictatorship has no base of popular support — its rule rests on naked force. And the political organisations of the working class, although outlawed and suppressed, remain an active force in Argentine politics. In fact the use of the term 'fascist' to characterise Argentina has little to do with the meaning of the term in the Marxist tradition. What it means — in the mouths of right and left-wing commentators — is that class relations in Argentina are maintained through the more widespread use of coercion than is typical in the Western bourgeois democracies.

However, even a glance at the rest of South America reveals that there is nothing peculiar about the scale of repression and denial of democratic rights in Argentina to justify singling it out with the label 'fascist'. Of the 10 major countries on the South American subcontinent only oil-rich Venezuela has any sort of stable democratic government. Peru and Ecuador have the semblance of an elected government — but both countries suffered military dictatorship right through the 'seventies. Even in Peru unions are under attack, political arrests are frequent and many oppositionists have

been murdered by the security forces. The rest are military dictatorships more or less comparable with Argentina's. The scale of terror and the toll of dead, disappeared and incarcerated varies according to the intensity of the class struggle in each country. In Chile, for example, things have been relatively peaceful since 1973 when the Pinochet regime, installed by the USA, massacred 30 000 people. Similarly in Bolivia, where the armed forces murdered around 1000 people in the mid 'seventies, stability has been restored. The toll of 8000 dead and 15 000 disappeared in the three years after the 1976 coup in Argentina reflects the strength of hostility to the regime and the ferocity with which it was met. Venezuela and Ecuador are the only countries on the subcontinent in which trade unions operate in anything approaching legality; in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay they have been suppressed. Censorship, torture and terror are part of everyday life under imperialist rule in virtually every country in South America.

So why single out Argentina? For the British ruling class the answer is simple. Argentina has long been one of the most important countries in Latin America for Britain. It is a major source of foodstuffs, an important market for manufactured goods and an outlet for investments. And Argentina has also long had a particular tendency to want to throw off the British yoke and pursue its own way in the world. The British bourgeoisie shouts 'fascist' and starts exposing the 'human rights' violations of any Argentine regime that challenges its interest in the area. Peron was the first to receive this treatment; now it's Galtieri's turn. The target of this propaganda is not Argentina: its aim is to unite the British people in support of whatever measures are necessary to bring the 'fascist' Argentines to heel.

Here the ruling class has scored a great success. *The Daily Telegraph* commented on the effectiveness of the Government's propaganda strategy as the Navy steamed towards the South Atlantic: 'The phrase "fascist junta" is almost guaranteed to whip into a jingoist fervour some Labour MPs who normally deplore all wars, rumours of wars, and NATO manoeuvres' (16 April).

And not just Labour MPs. The entire reformist and radical left press has joined in the vilification of the Argentine junta, reinforcing the consensus of support for the Government's war drive. The labour movement's long tradition of adapting to the interests of British imperialism in Argentina under the guise of anti-fascism has played a key part in pre-empting working class opposition to the current war.

Argentina is not a fascist country. However, even if it were, we would still support it in any war against Britain. To explain why we have to examine the real relationship between Britain and Argentina today.

David and Goliath

When Peron set about trying to make Argentina into a world power he was already half a century too late. The world had long been carved up among the dozen most advanced capitalist nations in Europe and North America – and they made sure of their supremacy. Britain forged an alliance with the big ranchers of Argentina to turn the country into a vast farm, producing meat and grain for export; at the same time it blocked the emergence of any industry to challenge Britain's status as the workshop of the world. 'Primary commodities' – meat, wheat, linseed, soya beans, etc (and some minerals) – still make up 76 per cent of Argentina's exports: a typical picture in Third World countries. The excessive reliance of its national economy on a few commodity markets reflects Argentina's subordination to the world economy; today's pattern is the legacy of a century of British domination.

Over the past 40 years Argentina has, however, become one of the most industrialised countries in South America – in 1978 45 per cent of its GDP resulted from industrial production. Again the pattern of industrial development results from the changing forms of imperialist domination. There are broadly two types of factory in Argentina.

One sort is run by Argentine capitalists who have taken advantage of the protective tariffs, first set up in the 'forties and maintained to some degree in certain sectors until recently, to manufacture consumer goods to substitute for imports. This sector has always been small in scale – in 1980 93 per cent of the country's 133 000 industrial companies employed less than 25 workers – and inefficient. The other sort is run by Argentines on behalf of foreign investors or directly by foreign capitalists drawn towards Argentina by the open door to imperialism policy of the post-Peron regimes. These firms are characterised by high levels of investment in large-scale factories. They are oriented towards the production of plant and machinery and consumer goods for export as well as for the domestic market. They are also characterised by high levels of productivity and profitability.

The wizard de Hoz

The penetration of the Argentine economy by foreign capitalists has accelerated rapidly since the military junta came to power in 1976. The following table shows the increase in foreign investment after 1977:

1978	●	\$316m
1979	●	\$457m
1980	●	\$600m

Between 1977 and 1980 a total of \$2779.8m poured into Argentina. The USA provided 37 per cent, followed by Italy (18 per cent), the Netherlands, France and Germany. Britain lagged behind, so that by 1980 it was pushed into fourth place in the league table of imperialist investors, behind the USA, Japan and Germany. The house journal of British capitalists, however, had nothing but praise for the President and his economic minister (educated at Eton and the Harvard Business School) Dr Jose Martinez de Hoz:

'President Videla is a sincere moderate who has the interests of his country at heart. . . it appears that Argentina may have chosen the right path leading to its renaissance as a major Latin American industrial and economic power.' (*Investors Chronicle*, 28 September 1979)



Martinez de Hoz was quoted as saying that 'there is now nearly always a welcome on the mat for Argentine borrowers' in Europe and the USA. Argentina's debts to foreign bankers leapt from \$10bn in 1977 to \$32bn four years later.

The top 20 companies in Argentina in 1979 reveal an economy tightly controlled by foreign capital. Of the 20 largest firms eight are nationalised industries supplying vital raw materials (iron and steel), energy (oil, gas and electricity), and transport services (air and rail). Nine are either American and European companies or their direct subsidiaries. Only three are Argentine firms – and the highest ranking of these Sasetu (15th), an industrial and financial conglomerate, went bankrupt last year.

The foreign investment boom – itself an expression of the stagnation of capital accumulation in the advanced capitalist countries – could not disguise the impact of the world recession on the Argentine economy. Indeed, even when the world economy was expanding in the 'fifties and 'sixties, even temporary fluctuations in the market produced serious crises in Argentina – indicating the vulnerability of its economy. The global recession of the 'seventies shook Argentina to its foundations – economically and politically. Agricultural revenues slumped and markets for manufactured goods contracted sharply. Industry slumped from an annual average growth rate of six per cent in the 'sixties to scarcely more than two per cent in the 'seventies. Inflation reached comic opera levels: in the 'sixties it averaged 21.8 per cent a year, in the 'seventies it was more than 120 per cent a year and was matched by massive currency devaluations. Last year Argentina's GDP actually fell by 6.1 per cent and its industrial output declined by 14 per cent (*Financial Times*, 5 April 1982).

The recession and the government's harsh austerity measures hit the working class hard. Real wages were cut in half in a couple of years as the following table shows:

1960 = 100	Supervisor	Labourer
1967	123.8	124.5
1975	116.4	123.9
1976	65.2	67.2
1977	46.6	53.8

(Argentine Ministry of Labour)

Bankruptcies of small firms reached record levels and unemployment, traditionally lower in Argentina than anywhere in Latin America, climbed rapidly to reach around two million recently. The government ruthlessly rationalised the public sector: on the railways, for example, it cut staff by 30 per cent, throwing 50 000 workers out of their jobs over a two year period.

No contest

Any comparison between Britain and Argentina reveals an enormous gulf of economic strength and political power. Argentina is the richest country in South America. Yet its 1979 per capita GNP — \$2230 — is little more than a third of the British figure — \$6320 — and Britain is today one of the poorest countries in Western Europe. The following table compares wage rates in Britain and in Brazil -- a country similar to Argentina -- in the electrical equipment industry:

Wages in selected countries 1970		
	Hourly wages \$	Wage costs as proportion of sales
Britain	1.49	0.21
Brazil	0.68	0.091

(From US Senate Committee on Finance, Implications of Multinational firms for World Trade and Investment and for US Trade and Labour, February 1973)

Wages in Britain are much lower than those in the USA and Germany — but they are still more than twice the levels in Latin America. Another sensitive index of the living standards of the masses is the infant mortality rate. In the USA it is 1.8 per cent; in the UK 1.4 per cent. In Argentina it runs at 6.5 per cent; in Brazil at 8.2 per cent.

The contrast between the armed forces of Britain and Argentina reflects the enormous difference in power of the two countries. Britain is one of the world's major military nations, with a highly professional and fully integrated army, navy and airforce. All the

forces are equipped with the most advanced conventional and nuclear weaponry. Apart from being only half the size of the British services, the Argentine armed forces are substantially made up of conscripts. They are burdened with much obsolete equipment acquired second-hand from Europe and the USA. And they are racked with political divisions resulting from their role as civilian as well as military administrators. Although they have built up their military capacity and acquired a fairly modern airforce, the Argentine armed forces are simply in a different league from Britain. The *Financial Times* acknowledged right from the start that Argentina didn't stand a chance:

'Independent strategists believe that any full-scale military confrontation between Britain and Argentina would almost certainly lead to the destruction of the Argentine navy and the loss of the bulk of the airforce. Casualties would be substantial on both sides, but particularly heavy on the Argentine side.' (5 April 1982)

Reports of the heroic exploits of the British task force are simply the cowardly bragging of a vicious bully who can swagger around the world brutalising those he has long held in subjection.



Viva Argentina!

The myth of British 'democracy' has been even more carefully cultivated than that of Argentine 'fascism'. It is of course true that universal suffrage and parliamentary government, a relatively uncensored press and unsuppressed trade unions have prevailed in Britain for some time. We will not dwell here on the increasing restrictions on the democratic rights of trade unionists, blacks and Irish people, women and others in British society. What is of immediate concern is the meaning of British 'democracy' for the millions of people in the backward capitalist world who live under imperialist — and particularly British imperialist — domination. We have already seen how Britain won its sphere of influence in Latin America through the ruthless deployment of its economic power and its brutal suppression of any threat to its interests. We have seen too, how the stabilisation of South American society under the control of countries

like Britain and the USA — another freedom-loving democracy — means military dictatorships, savage repression, and grinding poverty. We note in passing the record of British rule in India, the Far East, the Middle East, Africa, Ireland and the economic exploitation and political oppression that Britain still helps to maintain in these countries. British 'democracy' is one of history's rankest frauds. As one of the first liberal critics of British imperialism observed of Britain's claim to a civilising and pacifying mission, 'the *Pax Britannica*, always an impudent falsehood, has become a grotesque monster of hypocrisy' (JA Hobson, *Imperialism*, 1902, p126, 1938ed).

Argentina's military junta is indeed a reactionary, anti-working class force. But the coercive features of the Argentine regime do not derive from the peculiarities of its Generals, or indeed from any peculiarities of Argentina. Repression in Argentina, as in every other country in the backward capitalist world, results from the domination of imperialism. The junta at present in Buenos Aires was installed with American and British backing and it has enjoyed their full support: the primary responsibility for every atrocity it has inflicted on the Argentine people lies squarely in Washington and London. The Generals are corrupt and vicious — they have been trained, equipped and financed by British experts, with long and wide experience in every corner of the world.

In six years Argentina's junta has supervised the deaths of several thousand people and the imprisonment and torture of many more: in a century of imperial glory the British ruling class has presided over the slaughter of millions and it has conspired with its allies to turn half the world into a vast concentration camp which terror and starvation keep safe for 'democracy'. The record of British infamy makes Galtieri's junta look mild in comparison.

Should Britain succeed in clubbing its old slave back into submission it will probably lead to the fall of Galtieri. We may be sure he will be replaced by a ruler even more servile to the demands of his imperialist masters and, in response to these demands, even more coercive towards the masses. A British victory would mean even tighter imperialist control over Argentina, and more poverty, torture and murder for its people.

On the other hand a defeat for Britain in the South Atlantic would be the best possible result for the masses of Argentina. It would be a setback to imperialist domination in the region and create more favourable conditions for the development of the class struggle in Argentina. The key social force in Argentina is its numerous, highly organised and militant working class. A defeat for Argentina would lead to the more intense repression of the working class. A victory would be a tremendous boost for the anti-imperialist struggle. It would create conditions in which the working class could, for the first time, take the lead in challenging imperialism. The workers would not be slow in exposing and casting aside those bourgeois rulers who try to exploit the anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses to strengthen their bargaining position with the imperialists.

Whose democratic rights ?

THE GOVERNMENT'S justification for going to war against Argentina is the paramount importance of the Falkland Islanders' desire to remain under British rule rather than Argentine sovereignty. For the Parliamentary Labour Party too, the Falklanders' right to self-determination is of decisive importance, justifying its support for the Government's military action. Even Labour left-wing critics of the war agree in principle that 'the rights of the Falklanders to self-determination must be upheld', as last year's policy statement *A Socialist Foreign Policy* puts it. The left is simply uncertain whether despatching 26 000 men in the 100 ships of the naval task force might be going a bit far to uphold the Falklanders' 'democratic rights'.

But who are the Falkland Islanders? And what is the real significance of Britain's massive military operation, ostensibly to defend their wish to remain British?

Company islands

Britain seized the Malvinas from Argentina by military force in 1833. In 1851 a Royal Charter was granted for the Falkland Islands Company which has run the islands as its fiefdom ever since. The Falklands is a one-crop economy: more than 2000 tonnes of wool are exported annually, mainly to Britain. The Falkland Islands Company had an independent quotation on the London Stock Exchange for 120 years. In 1972 it was bought for £4m by Dundee Perth and London, a subsidiary of the Slater-Walker conglomerate. The main interest behind the takeover was in FIC's British subsidiary. The company held a substantial investment portfolio, including warehouses in Southampton, Southern Ships Stores and its 50 per cent holding in the Bradford wool merchant David Smith. In 1973 the company was taken over by Charrington Industrial Holdings. In 1977 the islands again changed hands, passing into the control of their current owners, the Coalite Group, a smokeless fuels firm based at Bolsover in Derbyshire. Depressed wool prices have squeezed profit margins in the last few years but FIC sales in 1981 still amounted to almost £3m.

The FIC's domination of the islands is well known. It owns 1.3 million acres, 46 per cent of the farmland and 267 000 of the 650 000 sheep. It directly employs 266 people — 15 per cent of the islands' 1800 population — and it indirectly controls the livelihoods of many more. Through its ownership of the islands' general store, bank and shipping agency it controls all commerce. It owns the charter vessel used for transporting wool to Britain and bringing vital supplies back. According to Lord Shackleton in his 1976 *Economic Survey of the Falkland Islands* (Economic Intelligence Unit) repatriated profits in the previous 20 years amounted to £5m. When wool prices were high, gross profits amounted to up to 42 per cent of the islands' GDP.

Shackleton characterised the relations between the FIC and the islanders as 'paternal-

istic...sometimes feudal'. The company's serfs live in rent-free shacks in the remote sheep pastures of 'the camp' — all the area outside the capital Port Stanley. The company also provides fuel and meat — mutton, called '365' after the number of days in the year the islanders get to eat it. When they pass retirement age, the islanders are obliged to leave their tied cottages and find somewhere to live in Stanley. Shackleton estimated living standards as 10 per cent lower than in Britain; there is no unemployment benefit, miserable pensions and family allowances, and education only up to 15 years of age.

A century and a half of British sovereignty has guaranteed a steady flow of profits to the Falkland Islands Company and a subsistence living to most of the islanders. In token of the esteem in which Mother England holds its colonial subjects, some 400 Falkland Islanders — those who cannot claim a grandparent of British birth — have been rendered stateless by the new Nationality Act.

'Self-determination' — another old lie

Britain invokes the rights of 1800 Falkland Islanders to 'self-determination' to refute the claims of 27 million Argentines to territories which historically, geographically, and politically they have every right to claim as their own. The Falklanders certainly have legitimate claims on Britain for compensation and resettlement if they desire. The British government should meet its responsibilities in full to these islanders whose exploitation it has long safeguarded.

But British claims for the Falkland Islanders' right to national self-determination are an absurdity which should be repudiated. In fact the Falklanders do not want to become independent: it is their desire to preserve British rule in the area that the British government is so concerned to defend. This is a familiar imperialist ploy: Britain is a staunch advocate of the rights of minorities it has settled in its colonies around the world — when these rights can be used to justify imperialist interests in the area.

The example closest to home is that of the Protestants in Ireland. Their rights to 'self-determination', to preserve British occupation of the Six Counties, are defended by every bourgeois politician in Britain. Turning this particular minority of settlers into a 'democratic' majority in favour of the British oppression of Ireland required some fancy footwork. The partition of the country in 1920 along a line carefully calculated to ensure a Protestant majority in the Six Counties did the trick. Now British spokesmen can claim that the annexation and occupation of the Six Counties rests on popular consent and withdrawal would be a violation of the democratic wish of the majority of the people. Thus have the democratic rights of four million Irish people and their aspirations for unity and independence been violated by British manipulation of the rights of the minority of one million Protestants settled in the north east.

It is worth noting that the same 'socialists' in Britain who swallow the bourgeois line about the rights of the Protestants and acquiesce to Britain's denial of the right to self-determination of the Irish people as a whole, have also capitulated to British propaganda about the Falklanders. On the right, Labour Party academic Bernard Crick, speaking on a platform of the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands early in June, presented the partition of Ireland as 'a sensible compromise'. He appealed, somewhat obscurely, for a similarly reasonable resolution of the dispute over sovereignty in the South Atlantic. On the left, *Socialist Organiser*, the paper of one of Labour's entryist factions, has in recent weeks coupled its repudiation of the struggle for Irish freedom with support for the Falklanders' democratic rights. These 'socialists' endorse Britain's manipulation of the Falklanders to deny the rights of the Argentine people.

In the Middle East Britain has been a staunch defender of the rights of Jewish settlers in Palestine - at the expense of the national rights of millions of Palestinians. In Africa the rights of a tiny minority of white settlers in Zimbabwe were given greater priority than the rights of the black majority, as Britain struggled to keep its grip over the country. British rule in Gibraltar has been legitimised by recourse to a referendum of its 13 000 people: 35 million Spaniards have yet to be consulted about the British occupation of part of their national territory. The last referendum, held in 1967, voted for British rule by 12 762 to 44: it was organised by the then Junior Minister for Commonwealth Affairs, Mrs (now Dame Commander of the British Empire) Judith Hart.

Malvinas are Argentina's

The Malvinas were part of that section of the Spanish American empire then ruled from Buenos Aires. Argentina claimed sovereignty when it became an independent country and it held control until British aggression made it part of its growing empire. The islands are part of the continental shelf off Argentina, naturally linked to the mainland.

Most importantly, however, the Malvinas under British rule are a symbol of imperialist domination in Latin America. The Union Jack, flying over Argentine territory only a few hundred miles away from the mainland, is a reminder of the legacy of humiliation and degradation when Britain held unchallenged sway over Argentina. But it is not just a reminder of the past. It is too a symbol of the present, of the oppressive consequences of imperialist control in Argentina today. It is no wonder that the Argentines - and indeed the masses throughout Latin America - fully support the ending of British sovereignty over the Malvinas.

If they won control over the Malvinas and expropriated every penny's worth of the assets of the Falkland Islands Company, the Argentine people would not have claimed back one thousandth of what they are owed by British imperialism.



The left's alternative war strategy

ON Sunday 18 April the National Council of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament suspended its proceedings and marched in its entirety to 10 Downing Street to deliver a message to the Prime Minister. The message summed up the approach of the British left to the war at a time when the fleet was well on its way to the South Atlantic:

'While we wholeheartedly condemn the invasion of the Falkland Islands by Argentina, we call upon the British Government to seek as a matter of urgency, a peaceful settlement through the United Nations.' (*Morning Star*, 19 April)

The message contained a three-point statement of demands:

- Nuclear depth charges and bombs carried by the Falklands task force must on no account be used. The Government's failure to rule this out is "dangerously irresponsible".
- Stop all war preparations, withdraw the task force and suspend the "maritime exclusion zone" around the Falklands.
- Seek a peaceful resolution of the dispute under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 502 — the only way to safeguard the interests of the Islanders. (*Morning Star*, 19 April)

The same meeting agreed to a proposal inspired by Dame Commander of the British Empire Judith Hart that CND should sponsor an Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands. The Labour left agreed with the Tories that the 'unprovoked aggression' of the 'fascist junta' should not go unpunished; it agreed that the rights of the Falkland Islanders should be defended. It disagreed, however, with the methods chosen by Margaret Thatcher — the immediate despatch of the naval task force — and it disagreed too with the Labour leadership's uncritical backing for Tory militarism.

The leaders of the left in Parliament — Tony Benn and Judith Hart — found themselves isolated. They could not rally the Tribune group of MPs against the party leadership, or even get their motions through key left-wing subcommittees of Labour's National Executive. At the same time they could see that extra-parliamentary left-wing protests against the war were inevitable. To consolidate their position, and to keep the anti-war movement under their control, Benn and Hart turned to CND.

The 18 April CND statement indicated the direction of the Ad Hoc Committee. As the war proceeded the British left rallied to the side of Britain, criticising the Tory conduct of the war and at every stage pushing its alternative strategy to defeat the Argentines.

No blood please — we're British socialists

Margaret Thatcher's approach to the South Atlantic war has attracted widespread support because it has been tough and consistent from the start. She has stated a clear aim — the repossession of the Malvinas — and done whatever was necessary in terms of diplomacy, economic sanctions and military measures to achieve it. The contrast with the left could not be greater: it endorsed Thatcher's objective but balked at the ruthless measures required to enforce British interests against Argentina.

The leadership of the Labour Party approves of military action to restore British sovereignty — but it is squeamish about blood being spilt. Thus it always goes for the softer military option. Michael Foot screamed for the task force to be sent. But he never intended that its murderous artillery should actually be *used*, as it was, for example, to sink the *General Belgrano*. The *New Statesman* agreed: eight weeks after the Navy was despatched it recalled that 'a fleet was sent to sea to give time for people to work out what' to do next (28 May). This is a novel conception of the function of a naval armada. When the fleet arrived in the South Atlantic, Foot seized on the idea of a blockade of the Islands rather than an invasion. After the marines and paratroops had established their beach-head the Labour leader wanted the military advance stopped for further talks.

The left's posturing against the war was even more pathetic than Foot's vacillating support for it. When the fleet was sent the left was silent: a week later it suddenly decided that the Navy should never have been sent. Benn's call for it to be withdrawn was safe enough when it was already half way across the ocean. Hart struck a position

mid-way between Foot and Benn by declaring that the fleet should stop where it was in mid-Atlantic. Reg Race proposed that it drop anchor in the Ascension Islands, from whence it could emerge at short notice to savage the Argies, should diplomacy fail to bring them to their knees.

Every Labour politician proclaimed to the media 'I'm no pacifist'. This meant that although they usually opposed the use of violence for political ends, they drew the line at General Galtieri and his Argentine forces who had inflicted a deep humiliation on Britain. Even CND came under pressure from supporters who backed conventional military action against Argentina in the present, despite their misgivings about nuclear war in the future. It was obliged to distance itself from pacifist sentiment. CND leader Monsignor Bruce Kent explained that CND's criticism of the Government's actions did not mean that it was soft on Britain's enemies: 'We don't rule out as a movement national military self-defence. Only 20 per cent of our members are pacifist' (*Time Out*, 21-27 May). For Monsignor Kent one of the key lessons of the whole affair was 'the need for a comprehensive alternative defence strategy' (*New Statesman*, 28 May). The development of such a strategy has been a major concern of the *New Statesman* for some time. It has drawn out the logic of much of the left's hostility to nuclear weapons – the promotion of stronger conventional forces (see 'The naval roots of folly', 23 April). The left's alternative army remains, however, a project for the future; for the present it moans away about Thatcher's military activities while recommending a different strategy for dealing with Argentina.

Strangulation – the socialist alternative

In Parliament Tony Benn criticised the Tories' escalation of the military conflict because, he said, it would antagonise US support for Britain. This was bad because 'Reagan has the power to strangle Galtieri provided we do not make war on him' (*The Times*, 21 May). Benn wanted the matter handed over to the UN, implicitly accepting that this was tantamount to placing Galtieri's neck within Reagan's ample grasp. He wanted Argentina to be asphyxiated by sanctions:

'In handing over they should step up sanctions because financial and economic sanctions, combined with the transfer of responsibility would almost certainly bring Galtieri down.' (21 May)

Benn's left-wing colleague Michael Meacher, writing in *The Times* a few days earlier, favoured the rope:

'The noose on Argentina could clearly be tightened. The 30 day overdraft loans should not be renewed. British-owned banks and banking subsidiaries should be brought within the sanctions net.' (17 May)

Meacher was very critical of the way the Government had been 'down-playing' the role of sanctions, when 'finance remains Galtieri's Achilles Heel'. He wanted the imperialist bankers to step up their economic war against Argentina and to press the USA into destroying its remaining supply lines.

For the left, the economic warfare of a major imperialist power against the fragile economy of a backward capitalist country is a principled alternative to Tory militarism. For the masses of Argentina its consequences are exactly the same — because its objective is the same. The aim of the task force and the aim of sanctions is to restore Argentina's subordination to the imperialist order. The consequences are the further impoverishment and oppression of the Argentine people. The same is true of the left's other 'alternative' to imperialist militarism — imperialist diplomacy, preferably at the UN.

The United Nations is the institution that confers legitimacy on the world imperialist order and on the interventions of its chief guarantor, the USA. (For an account of the operation and the record of the UN in Palestine, Korea, Suez, Zaire, Syria, and the Lebanon, see 'A thieves' kitchen', *the next step*, No 25, June 1982.) After the Argentine take over of the Malvinas the Security Council passed the celebrated (on the British left) resolution 502 which

- demands an immediate cessation of hostilities
- demands an immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands
- calls on the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom to seek a diplomatic solution to their differences (*The Times*, 5 April).

This resolution is mandatory: non-compliance by Argentina allows Britain to impose sanctions ranging from diplomatic to military measures.

Resolution 502 has become the centrepiece and focus of the left's policy on the war. The resolution reflects the full backing of the imperialist powers for Britain in its stand against a Third World country trying to get some of its own back on its masters. But it allows the left to reconcile its loyalty to Britain with its distaste for British militarism through its faith in the power of negotiation to resolve conflict. But the negotiation is not between equal partners and the UN is not a neutral forum. Britain meets Argentina at the negotiating table with all its wealth and power backing up its position. And Britain sits at the UN with the major world powers of the West on its side in any conflict where the general interests of imperialism are at stake.

Argentina negotiates at the UN with a pistol at its head: any deal worked out there could only be to the disadvantage of the Argentine people. The British left's appeal to the UN as an 'alternative' way of handling the dispute is simply a capitulation to British imperialism at one remove.

Come all you old liberals

Having elaborated an alternative way of fighting the war against Argentina, the Labour left turned to mobilise support for it. It did not look to the unions or the working class — its whole orientation was towards the liberal middle class, pacifists and church-

men. Its aim was not to rally workers against the Government's strategy, but to persuade middle class opinion that there was a better way of bringing the Argentines to heel. This approach guided the strategy of the Ad Hoc Committee.

At demonstrations and meetings organised by the Ad Hoc Committee pride of place always goes to the most reactionary elements present. Thus the 'assembly order' for demonstrations: 'peace and religious groups at head of march followed by trade unions with political parties/ groups at end'. And at its rallies, speakers from the churches and the Social Democratic Party — organisations that mobilise virtually nobody for the marches — make long speeches, while left-wing groups that march in substantial contingents are allowed no representative on the platform. The major London 'teach-in' on the Falklands organised by the Ad Hoc Committee was a classic example of this quest for respectability. The star speaker was *Guardian* journalist Peter Jenkins, a prominent member of the SDP. He was warmly received and applauded to the echo by the crowd of 1000 people present. His regular articles in *The Guardian* indeed reflect a current of liberal opinion that criticises the conduct of the war along similar lines to the Labour left. Jenkins upholds the rights of the Falkland Islanders, but considers that the Government's military response is out of all proportion to the injury suffered by Britain. He condemns Argentina unreservedly, accusing Galtieri of 'bovine criminality' and questioning his ability to read (12 May), but he is particularly concerned to carry US and EEC backing for any course of action Britain pursues. He does not rule out the use of military force — he too is no pacifist. But he thinks Thatcher's jingo rhetoric is rather vulgar and he finds distasteful her use of the bludgeon of the task force instead of the rapier of sanctions and diplomacy. He is, in short, a liberal disgusted at the ruthlessness of the British ruling class and somewhat unnerved at Thatcher's boldness. He likes his imperialist policy a bit less harsh, a bit more refined. At least he is honest — he is a member of a bourgeois party who makes no claim to be a socialist. The other main platform speakers, Tam Dalyell, Bernard Crick and EP Thompson, who echoed Jenkins' every remark, if rather less cogently, all claim the authority of socialism for their radical bourgeois foreign policy.

Historian and nuclear disarmament EP Thompson was invited by *The Times* 'to give the case against' the war. This is how he began:

'I have been called out, along with all other loyal Britons, to pronounce my views on the Falklands crisis. And I am ready to stand up and be counted as one of those who is utterly disgusted with the Argentine regime and with its actions. Argentina has long been known as a place of refuge, not only for the odd Nazi war criminal, but also for odious fascist ideologies.' (29 April)

One wonders how he would have opened an article in support of the war. A month later he was again wringing himself out in public, this time in *The Guardian*. The war was a crazy mistake for Britain: 'It is in defiance of all calculations of interest. There is no realism about it' (31 May). What was really worrying Thompson was that 'a major British defeat could have appalling consequences within our culture'. The consequences of a British victory for the 'culture' of Argentina were of no concern to this intellectual

hero of British socialism and self-appointed protector of 'our' culture. The Ad Hoc Committee carefully cultivated every academic, journalist, bishop and politician whose liberal conscience was upset at the thought of British blood being spilt for no very good reason they could perceive. The same middle class sensibilities were gravely offended by the crude jingoism of the gutter press. Platforms of the Ad Hoc Committee regularly rang with denunciations of *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Star*, while offering heartfelt congratulations to *The Guardian* for its more discreet advocacy of British interests. The orientation of the Ad Hoc Committee towards the right, however, dictated a hard line against the left.

The Labour leaders of the Ad Hoc Committee were deeply embarrassed by newspaper accounts that the first national demonstration organised by the Committee on 9 May had been supported by contingents calling for a British defeat. The challenge of anti-imperialist politics provoked a clear statement of the alternative bourgeois option being canvassed by the Ad Hoc Committee and a clear indication that the Committee intended to restrict the anti-war movement to its own narrow perspective.

The organisations involved in the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands are seriously concerned over some of the slogans used on the demonstration on Sunday, 9th May.

We want to make it clear that the aims of the committee are:

1. to stop the war over the Falkland Islands.
2. to pursue a peaceful settlement through negotiations at the United Nations.

We are campaigning for the end of hostilities; we are not supporters of Argentina or enemies of Britain.

We know and readily accept that many organisations will have more detailed policies, but these proposals, as already outlined, have been accepted by this Committee over three meetings, and are the ones that embrace and unite all organisations involved. We come together on the basis that it is the common ground of cessation of hostilities and negotiations through the United Nations that unites us at our demonstrations, not accentuation of the differences.

We have no wish to restrict organisations pursuing their own policies independently. We do demand, however, when supporting demonstrations called by the Ad Hoc Committee, that they should conform to the central policy of the Committee.

We wish to make it clear to the Press, the British public and all organisations that refusal to do so makes those organisations not supporting our aims unwanted and unwelcome on this Committee or its demonstrations.

'We are not supporters of Argentina or enemies of Britain' declared the Ad Hoc Committee. What it meant was 'we want peace, but while the war continues we are enemies of Argentina and supporters of Britain'.

The Ad Hoc Committee took firm action against anti-imperialists on its demonstrations. CND stewards cooperated with the police to prevent slogans against British imperialism being chanted and pointed out people to be arrested. The Committee also moved to curb the growing movement against the war. National events were badly advertised and promoted. The Committee encouraged provincial groups to hold local events on the Saturday before the major national demonstration on 23 May -- token local demos

inevitably cut down on the London protest. As the war on the Malvinas reached its peak the Committee dissolved the anti-war campaign into a long-planned CND protest on 6 June. While the war raged on it put off all further protests until mid-July. While British troops were dying in battle, the last thing Benn and Hart wanted was to be at the head of an anti-war movement that, the more it grew, the more difficult it would be to control. The Ad Hoc Committee, a mobiliser of liberal opinion in favour of non-violent warfare against Argentina, turned to de-mobilise the potential for a mass anti-war movement.

Bring the war to Britain

THE Revolutionary Communist Party's approach to the South Atlantic war begins from the understanding that this conflict stems from the determination of the imperialist countries to consolidate their grip over Latin America. It is not necessary to invent any narrow economic or military purpose behind the British action. It is very dubious whether the oil deposits in the region could be profitably exploited: Britain has no need for a base commanding the Cape Horn and the cause of the Antarctic exploration would not prompt a major military engagement. The *Financial Times*, a consistent sober supporter of the Government's action, admitted that there was 'no vital national interest in any material or strategic sense' at stake in the Falklands (7 April). So why go to war?

Britain had to go to war against Argentina because it had the temerity, as a Third World country, to use military force against one of the world's foremost imperialist powers. The *Financial Times* explained why Britain could not tolerate such action:

'If such bare-faced attacks were allowed to achieve their ends, then the consequences would be grave not just in one or two remaining British outposts, but for peace in many areas – not least in the South American continent itself.' (6 April)

Defence Secretary John Nott made the same point a few days later:

'If you don't stop an aggressor, albeit one that attacked a small group of islands 8000 miles away from Britain, then someone else will have a go somewhere else in the world.' (*The Times*, 10 April)

Britain has vast investments in its spheres of influence around the world. If Argentina could seize back what Britain had plundered from it in the past, and get away with it, no British interest in the Third World would be safe.

The British Government has placed great emphasis on Argentina's defiance of international laws, treaties and conventions. This has been of vital importance in rallying the

support of the Western powers for British action. The imperialist powers are keen supporters of the international rule book, because they wrote it. They are also attached to institutions like the UN that enforce the rules; this framework stabilises and legitimises the system of world imperialist control. The Western powers have thus, in general, backed Britain against Argentina. It is true that the USA has tried to preserve its relations with Latin America by occasionally adopting a neutral, mediating posture. And some EEC countries have baulked at sanctions because of their own national concerns about the conflict. But when it mattered the imperialist powers gave their full support to Britain's military action against Argentina. They too have their spheres of influence around the world and every interest in seeing Argentina humbled.

Left mumbo jumbo

While the British media declared that 'our boys' were fighting for the principles of freedom and democracy, the left presented its own confused explanations of the war. Most radical left groups portrayed Argentina as an imperialist power in its own right and went on to deny the imperialist dynamic behind Britain's offensive.

Socialist Worker dismissed the notion that Argentina was 'backward': it was 'an advanced industrial country', comparable with a weak imperialist power such as Spain (17 May). *Militant*, which adopted a pro-imperialist view on the war consistent with its position on Ireland, tied itself in knots in its attempts to deny imperialist domination over Argentina. In a major feature, Lynn Walsh contemptuously dismissed the view that Argentina was 'a totally dependent, semi-colonial state', only to conclude that it was 'still locked into a position of neo-colonial dependency' (28 May).

Whatever this meant, Walsh discerned 'an imperialistic element in Argentine capitalism's claim to the Falklands'. This theoretical breakthrough — the discovery of a neo-colonial imperialist power — helped to justify *Militant's* acquiescence to Britain's attack on Argentina. Investigative journalists from *Socialist Organiser* were busy exposing Argentina's 'imperialist' exploits in Bolivia, El Salvador and in the proposed UN-sponsored military alliance with South Africa. Slowly but surely a consensus emerged which portrayed Britain as almost progressive in comparison with Argentina.

Having analysed imperialism out of existence the left went on to reduce the war to a conflict between egos. The peculiar personalities of Thatcher and Galtieri were blamed for provoking the outbreak of war. SWP leader Duncan Hallas saw the forces of irrationality at work:

'There is no longer a rational, if predatory, cause of the dispute. The Falklands are of no great significance. Pure prestige and internal politics are the driving force on both sides.' (*Socialist Review*, May-June 1982)

The focus was on individual psychology: on the one hand a sadistic psychopath — on the other a lunatic. 'Neither Galtieri or Thatcher' became the cry. It was the need

'to save Thatcher's face' that launched 100 ships and 26 000 men; the central issue of imperialism was thrown out the window.

Under the wing of reaction

Given its political outlook it is not surprising that the left simply fell in line behind the Ad Hoc Committee's campaign for an alternative imperialist policy. Of course, many had doubts about the wisdom of this course. But the risk of unpopularity finally swayed the argument. When CND launched the Ad Hoc Committee, the left was right behind it. 'This is a great step towards turning the tide against Thatcher's madness', commented *Socialist Challenge* enthusiastically (22 April). It was not too keen on the third point in the Committee's 3-point declaration:

'There are serious problems in the CND declaration which we think can be overcome through joint action — if, for example, the anti-war movement calls for a settlement on the basis of UN motion 502, as CND proposes.'

However, the first two points were OK. They first demanded that the Government rule out the use of nuclear weapons; but when Britain had overwhelming superiority in conventional forces why should it need to nuke the Argentines? The key point was the second: 'In our view the demand to stop the fleet is a principled one which squarely confronts the war efforts of our own ruling class'.

In the view of *Socialist Challenge* — and other left groups — the formal commitment of the Ad Hoc Committee to stopping the fleet and to 'peace in the Falklands', justified the left in collaborating with the Committee. In reality the slogans of peace effectively blurred the distinction between those who were opposed to war against Argentina and those who wanted war waged by different — more 'peaceful' — means. This confusion inevitably obstructed the emergence of a genuine anti-war movement. Everyone wants peace in the South Atlantic. For Thatcher peace means the humiliation of Argentina through military defeat; for the Labour left on the Ad Hoc Committee, peace means Argentina's defeat through economic sanctions. For us peace means the defeat of British imperialism. As it stands, the slogan for peace serves to reconcile genuine anti-war aspirations with the interests of the British ruling class.

The left argues that the 'serious problems' of the Ad Hoc Committee platform can be overcome through 'joint action'. But how can joint action transform liberal patriotism into an anti-imperialist commitment? To win over supporters of the Ad Hoc Committee to an internationalist outlook requires an open and resolute struggle against the policies of the Committee.

The radical left has proved incapable of waging such a struggle. Even when the SWP and the IMG were forced to leave the Committee because of their opposition to the proposed 'UN solution' they refused to clarify their differences. Readers of *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Challenge* will look in vain for any *account* of these bureaucratic

restrictions on the anti-war movement, never mind criticism of the policy of the Committee. When the Committee issued its directives on acceptable slogans, the radical left meekly acquiesced and marched along tamely behind the vicars and pacifists, refusing to participate in an anti-imperialist contingent.

The left's silent acquiescence to the Ad Hoc Committee is in sharp contrast to its denunciation of anti-imperialist slogans. Left-wing stewards denounced anti-imperialist contingents on demonstrations for being 'sectarian'. In Hackney, for example, *Socialist Challenge* supporters voted with the Labour Party and the Stalinists against a proposal that the slogan 'The Malvinas are Argentinas' should be part of the platform of the anti-war campaign in the area. Elsewhere radical left politicians informed audiences that fighting for the defeat of British imperialism is inopportune while war fever is running high.

Action for a British defeat

The intensity of war fever makes no difference to what must be said and done by anti-imperialists in Britain. In fact there is a perfect convergence between the international responsibilities of British workers and their domestic interests. The labour movement has a duty to support Argentina against Britain because any setback to imperialism in the area creates more favourable conditions for the advance of the working class movement against imperialism and its local agents in Argentina. At the same time any setback to the British state in the South Atlantic would be a blow against the main enemy of British workers at home. A defeat for British imperialism would be a blow for freedom in Argentina and in Britain.

A distinctive strategy follows from this perspective. Our aim must be to mobilise British workers against the war, to use their industrial strength to undermine the war effort and to contribute to the defeat of the British state on the home front. This approach follows a long, if interrupted, tradition of working class opposition to imperialist war. Revolutionaries in Europe before, during and after the First World War fomented disaffection and mutiny in the bourgeois armed forces and organised trade union blacking and sabotage of military supplies.

That such a strategy today seems inconceivable is simply a measure of how far anti-imperialist sentiments in the labour movement have been corrupted by the alternative imperialist policies promoted by the labour bureaucrats. The response to the South Atlantic war indicates the dimensions of the problem. Britain's professional armed forces have, in recent years, been recruited from the most backward sections of society. They are intensively schooled in right-wing prejudices and carefully isolated from disruptive political influences. Workers in the armaments industries and in the ports and naval dock-yards have welcomed the war as a way of saving jobs. Dockers called off their national strike in the national interest – some even blacked routine exports of steel to *Argentina*; and the seamen's union voted in support of the Govern-



ment. Workers in many different unions worked around the clock to get the fleet to sea; others, for example, firemen in East London, have organised collections to help finance the war effort. Trade union leaders like Terry Duffy and Moss Evans who have declared their approval for the war have not been faced with a wave of opposition from the rank and file.

Yet there is widespread working class suspicion and unease about the Government's war mongering. The radical left claims that the working class has been overcome with a wave of jingoist hysteria — to justify their own adaptations to British chauvinism. The reality, however, is different. The most backward sections of the working class — the one third that consistently votes Tory — can always be relied upon to respond to *Sun*-style jingoism. What matters is the outlook of the more class conscious workers, those who are active trade unionists, hostile to employers and suspicious of bourgeois policies at home and abroad.

These workers have been looking for a political lead over the South Atlantic war. On the one hand they could see Tory policy – firm leadership, audacious execution and clear presentation. On the other hand they could see Foot, who wanted military war without bloodshed, and Benn who wanted to fight a war with ineffectual ‘peaceful’ measures. Not surprisingly, Thatcher swept the board, rallying the middle classes and the more right-wing workers to her side. It was not that militant workers – who hate everything that Thatcher stands for – were galvanised into an orgy of Union Jack waving: they weren’t. It was simply that they had no coherent alternative around which to mobilise working class opinion against the war.

The RCP has begun to provide such an alternative. We put forward a policy that could mobilise workers against the war and provide the political basis for the sort of industrial and political action that could really stop it.

On 6 June 250 000 people marched in London against nuclear war. This demonstration was more than 30 times the size of the biggest protest against the war in the South Atlantic. Hundreds of thousands of people in Britain are hostile to militarism; they are determined to prevent the impending Third World War. Yet few are prepared to stand up in opposition to British militarism directed against the Argentine people today. The problem is how to turn aspirations for peace in the future into action against war in the present?

For the RCP, this means challenging the prejudices that stand in the way of those who are against war in general taking sides against Britain in the war against Argentina. It means exposing Labour’s lie about Argentine ‘fascism’ and insisting that, whatever the crimes of the junta, British imperialism is a hundred times more reactionary. It means revealing the hypocrisy of Labour’s defence of the rights of the Falkland Islanders, and defending the rights of the Argentine people to own the Malvinas. And it means repudiating the cynical fraud of a negotiated solution at the United Nations. It means calling for the only sort of peace that can open the way to progress in Latin America – the peace that will come through the destruction of Britain’s pernicious influence in the area. These are the principles we have to popularise to stop the war against Argentina – and to prevent the drive towards war around the world. Britain’s invasion of the South Atlantic is merely an opening skirmish in the prelude to the next world war. From Lebanon, through Chad and Namibia to El Salvador, imperialism is on the war-path. For now the ruling class, ably assisted by the Labour Party and trade union leaders, holds the initiative. This is all the more reason to redouble our efforts to break the chains that tie the labour movement to the British war machine.

Our war is not in the South Atlantic, but at home. Let’s force the ruling class to fight its battles on the streets of Britain, not in the pastures of the Malvinas.

Mike Freeman

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