

Editorial

War in the South Atlantic and the U.S. Left

The recent war in the Falkland Islands provided US revolutionaries with an uninvited opportunity to demonstrate the value of our Marxist analytical framework and its application to concrete situations. In an increasingly war-like world, even a relatively small conflagration such as this one can have serious international repercussions. Our critical response to these situations must, of necessity, be guided by internationalist socialist principles. In the face of this responsibility the position of much of the Marxist-Leninist left regarding the Malvinas crisis has been both disappointing and alarming.

Disappointing because Marxist-Leninists have failed to practice conjunctural analysis, to use their political theory in a rigorous, critical sense. Alarming because these same forces have allowed their misguided sense of solidarity with the "Third World" to sweep them behind the war drives of a reactionary military dictatorship in the name of "national sovereignty and anti-colonialism." American Marxists have had no trouble dissecting British motives, domestic reasons favoring the war, and the objective character of Thatcher's imperial policy in this conflict. But when it came to Argentina American Marxist-Leninists seem to have left their analytical skills behind. The Communist Party, Socialist Workers Party, Communist Labor Party and a host of others climbed aboard the Argentine war wagon, cheering on the Military Junta in its crusade to defend Argentine "national territory" and "self-determination." This remarkable performance might be excused by a plea of ignorance of the facts. Unfortunately, its basis must be sought elsewhere.

Indeed, the facts of this war are hardly in dispute. In the first place, Argentina's claim to the Islands is no better than Britain's, being derivative rather than direct. The Argentines claim to have "inherited" the Malvinas from the Spanish Empire which had a prior claim to them, when Argentina declared its independence from Spain in 1810-1816. Secondly, there is no argument that Argentina invaded the Falklands and imposed itself upon a hostile population which had no desire whatsoever to become Argentine. Thirdly, the character of the regime which planned this operation is clear: Argentina's military dictatorship's bloody record is well known, and has, until now, earned it the much deserved enmity of the left. It was, in fact, the rising opposition to this regime which contributed in no small part to Galtieri's decision to invade.

Politically, the left apologetics for the Military Junta's claims prove themselves to be spurious after even the most superficial perusal. The attempt to somehow construe the concept of self-determination as justifying Argentine aggression is ludicrous: the Leninist theory of self-determination may be many things, but it was intended to be a matter of the actual decision of the people directly involved, not of one government's "right" to claim some territory inhabited by others. The question of self-determination in the Falklands is a problem for its inhabitants: it cannot be settled "for them" by the Argentine military lest the very concept of *self-determination* lose all meaning.

But perhaps the most important consideration in the War is the one which Marxist-Leninists have singularly ignored. For months prior to the invasion it was well known (and commented on in the left press) that Argentina was a leading, if not *the* leading force in an emergent US organized anti-communist alliance directed against the revolution unfolding in Central America. Given this information, it should have been clear that *the defeat of Argentina in the Falklands was imperative if this military action against the revolutions in El Salvador and Nicaragua was to be forestalled.* The bulk of the Leninist left seems to have lost sight of the fact that it was this Central American revolutionary process, rather than Argentina's national sovereignty, which was the real stake in the Falkland's War. How ironic that forces who thought they were supporting the best interests of the "Third World" by backing Argentina were, in fact, allying themselves with one of imperialism's primary supporters in its efforts to strangle third world revolution!

The fact that some US Marxists allowed longstanding opposition to British imperialism to overshadow this *immediate* threat to the Central American revolution only shows how poorly they have mastered the rudiments of conjunctural analysis and revolutionary political practice, and how shallow is their conception of our international responsibilities.

Why did US Marxist-Leninists so easily rally to Argentina's defense? It is easy to point to the Soviet support for the Argentine military which obviously determined the CPUSA's position; or Cuba's support influencing the Socialist Workers Party and others. More generalized, more diffuse, and therefore perhaps more serious is another factor which has influenced the broadest sections of the US left: the misinterpreted

application of what we understand to be our specific revolutionary responsibility and commitment to national liberation struggles and revolutionary regimes in the "Third World."

Solidarity: Real and Imagined

The Vietnamese war against American aggression, the activity of the other national liberation struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the Cuban Revolution and the relative quiescence of the workingclass in the advanced capitalist countries, all combined in the 1960s and 1970s to give rise to a pervasive enthusiasm for Third World struggles on the part of revolutionaries in the West. Marxists in the advanced capitalist countries, in the rather poetic words of V. G. Kiernan, "seemed inclined to wait for political salvation to come from the wilderness, from eruptions of volcanoes that in the West seen extinct." This enthusiasm was coupled with an extreme defensiveness, given the persistence of imperialist attacks, military, economic and ideological. As in the 1930s (and still today) when official Communists refused to criticize the USSR for fear of contributing to the anti-Soviet chorus, so in the 1970s all criticism of the national liberation struggles and post-revolutionary regimes were anathema, lest one contribute to imperialism's ideological counter-revolution.

It is precisely for this reason that the Chinese "theory of three worlds" came so naturally to US Marxist-Leninists: it gave a theoretical cover to what they had been doing all along. Supporters of the theory did not have to examine a country's class struggle, its state system or its forms of economic, political and ideological organization. It was enough to know that a country was in the "Third World" and manaced by imperialism to support it against the "superpowers."

If breaking with the "Theory of Three Worlds" meant anything, it meant a renewed commitment to critically examining and producing a qualitative and strategic analysis of all countries, their social systems and the prospects for genuine socialism, regardless of their location in the world system. Such an analysis requires a different framework of concepts, different questions to be posed, and different approaches to producing the necessary answers. The failure of the bulk of the Marxist-Leninist left to oppose Argentine militarism with the same fervor with which they fought British imperialism shows that, while they may have broken with the "Theory of Three Worlds," they have not entirely broken with the thinking behind it.

This situation is simply intolerable if US Marxists expect to build a viable movement for socialism in this country, firmly linked to other international forces working in the same direction. The reality is that national liberation and anti-colonial movements as well as post-colonial nationalist regimes are the products of profoundly contradictory and diverse social processes. The persistent efforts of misguided leftists to see them only through rose-colored glasses, or to uncritically support their every defense against Western capital does a distinct disservice to all concerned. It robs metropolitan revolutionaries of concrete information and

critical insights. It robs the actual participants themselves of the help that others might provide them in confronting the very real problems which they face.

Finally, the broad masses of working people who form the potential base of a mass socialist movement in this country never have and never will be fooled by the left's attempts to portray everything as "wonderful" in post-revolutionary societies. The Marxist-Leninist left itself is not ignorant of the fact that the situation is very different in those countries, but rather is loath to speak the truth for a variety of reasons. To cite only one example, anyone who has had even a passing acquaintance with the published materials of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea is well aware of the grotesque cult of the personality which pervades them. A little deeper examination of the reality behind this appearance reveals the absence of genuine party life, a tremendous state system and the lack of meaningful political practice on the part of the masses. Alongside of this, though, is tremendous economic development and a rising standard of living. Yet where is the Marxist-Leninist group which will speak the whole truth about this situation, and whose interests are served by concealing the former political problems behind a bright picture of economic progress?

Revolutionary responsibility and commitment, to ourselves, to our international comrades and to the movement we hope to build, demands that we openly confront these problems, actively involving ourselves in a fruitful process of analysis and struggle with revolutionaries here and abroad; not the misguided effort to conceal problems in the interests of supporting the "Third World" against imperialism. If the latter practice prevails in the end we may well find that, as in the Falklands crisis, the real obstacle to understanding and going forwards is ourselves. Now more than ever it is necessary to continue to confront imperialism in its homelands, most particularly our own, while at the same time remaining unremitting in our critical examination of the real situation and prospects for national liberation and socialism throughout the world.

