

Chapter 13: Centrism's Failure in the Struggle against Imperialist Wars

We remarked above that centrism is not capable of taking a consistent internationalist position because it reflects in one form or another a petty-bourgeois class viewpoint, in particular the pressure of the labor bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy which again adapts to the capitalist class and its state. We demonstrated in previous chapters how this leads various centrists to open rejection or gross distortions of key aspects of the Marxist theory of imperialism – like on the questions of semi-colonial countries, super-exploitation, “sub-imperialism”, labor aristocracy, etc.

Naturally adaption to the petty-bourgeois reformism expresses itself not only in the theoretical and analytical sphere. It has inevitable important consequences for the practical position of centrism in the international class struggle, for the tactics which these organizations advocate. And indeed, as we will show, this happens to be the case.

What nearly all centrists in the imperialist countries have in common is a *platonic* “*Anti-Imperialism*”. This means a social-pacifist or even social-imperialist capitulation to the pressure of their imperialist bourgeoisie transmitted via the labour bureaucracy and the left-liberal intelligentsia – covered by a formal opposition to imperialism and wars in words. They adapt to the imperialist pressure of their own bourgeoisie by failing to call and work for the defeat of their own ruling class, by failing to call and work for the victory of the oppressed people in the semi-colonial world against their own imperialism. We will see this if we look at a number of imperialist wars against oppressed people in the last three decades.⁶⁹⁹

i) The Malvinas War in 1982

In the spring of 1982 Argentina – ruled by a reactionary military dictatorship at that time – took back the Malvinas Islands which are in front of its coast but

⁶⁹⁹ In German language we have already published a number of critical studies of the centrists' failure in their anti-imperialist duty. See for example: Michael Pröbsting: „*Europäische Linkspartei, CWI und der Libanon-Krieg: Kleinbürgerliche Linke als verkleidete Diener des Imperialismus*“ (Revolutionärer Marxismus Nr. 36, 2006, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/libanon-krieg-und-linke>; Martin Suchanek: Berliner Linkspartei unterstützt zionistische Kriegshetzer, <http://www.arbeitermacht.de/infomail/403/berlinerlinkspartei.htm>; Roman Birke „*Europäische Linkspartei und KPÖ: Degenerationsprozeß zeigt sich in der Kosova-Frage*“; Michael Pröbsting „*Der Tschad-Konflikt und die Linke: Schein-Antiimperialismus mit marxistischen Phrasen getarnt*“, in „*Unter der Fahne der Revolution*“ Nr. 2/3 (April 2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/tschad-intervention-und-linke>; Michael Pröbsting: Der Verrat der 'Linken' im Gaza-Krieg; in: *Unter der Fahne der Revolution*, Nr. 4 (2009), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/gaza-krieg-und-linke>

occupied by British imperialism. The right-wing Tory government of Margaret Thatcher sent the British Navy and troops and – after a 74-day war with more than 900 dead – they re-occupied the islands. *Militant* – the mother section of the CWI (which at that time also had the leading cadre of the later split IMT, Ted Grant and Alan Woods, in its ranks) – completely capitulated to the imperialist pressure. The CWI supported and still supports until today Britain’s claims on the Malvinas. It not only failed to support Argentina but even failed to call for an end of the war and a withdrawal of the British troops! It slanders opponents of the imperialist war as “*the ultra-left sects who, all forlorn, cry ‘Stop the war!’*”⁷⁰⁰ Instead the centrist CWI called for new elections to bring the Labour Party into power and ... to continue the war against Argentina “on socialist lines”!

*“The labour movement should be mobilised to force a general election to open the way for the return of a Labour government to implement socialist policies at home and abroad. Victory of a socialist government in Britain would immediately transform the situation in relation to the Falklands. The junta would no longer be able to claim to be fighting British imperialism ... A Labour government could not just abandon the Falklanders and let Galtieri get on with it. But it would continue the war on socialist lines.”*⁷⁰¹

While formally opposing the right-wing Thatcher government, the CWI called for alternative measures to fight against semi-colonial Argentina and to support British imperialism’s claims on the Malvinas: “*As an alternative to Thatcher’s war, we called for international class action against the junta such as trade union blacking of trade.*”⁷⁰² And this at the same time as the British government was waging an imperialist war against Argentina!

As a justification it referred to the right of national self-determination ... of the 1.800 British colonial settlers living on the Malvinas Islands! The CWI leadership defends their capitulation until today. In his book on the history of *Militant*, CWI leader Peter Taaffe argues: “*The democratic rights of the 1,800 Falklanders, including the right to self-determination, if they so desired, was a key question in the consciousness of British workers. (...) Marxists could not be indifferent to the fate of the Falklanders, particularly given the consciousness of the British working class as it developed over this issue.*”⁷⁰³

In other words, since the CWI leadership believes that British imperialism has succeeded in poisoning the consciousness of the British working class by colonial, aristocratic prejudices, it considers itself impotent to oppose this

⁷⁰⁰ Lynn Walsh: Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement? in: *Militant International Review*, Nr. 22, Juni 1982 (reprinted in: *Socialism Today*, Nr. 108, April 2007, <http://www.socialismtoday.org/108/falklands.html>)

⁷⁰¹ Lynn Walsh: Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement?

⁷⁰² Roger Shrivies: Falklands/Malvinas 1982 - Thatcher’s War Of Saving Face, *The Socialist (CWI)* 3 May 2002, http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/html_article/2002-252-index#article4

⁷⁰³ Peter Taaffe: *The Rise of Militant*, London 1995, Chapter 20 “The Falklands/Malvinas War”, <http://socialistalternative.org/literature/militant/>

but rather joins British imperialism's "care" for the settlers! Naturally such an ill-concealed support for the logic of colonialism is a shame for any group which calls itself "Marxist". The CWI propaganda is exactly a reflection of the imperialist propaganda to justify its global interventions by referring to the fate of their settlers. We will later see that the CWI repeats this reactionary logic in its support for Zionism and Israel's right to exist.

The same supposed backward consciousness of the British working class was utilized by the CWI leadership to justify its refusal to mobilize for an end of the war: *"To force the withdrawal of the Task Force would have involved the organization of a general strike, which itself would have posed the question of the coming to power of a socialist government. Yet at the outset of the war, such a demand would have received no support from the British workers. (...) Nor would the call to stop the war or to withdraw the fleet have provided a basis even for a mass campaign of demonstrations, meetings and agitation."*⁷⁰⁴

Another argument which the CWI leaders invented was the supposed "imperialist" character of Argentina: *"The Argentine regime's invasion was not a war of 'national liberation' against imperialism. On the contrary, in seizing the Falklands/Malvinas the Argentine Junta was pursuing the 'imperialist' aims of Argentine capitalism."*⁷⁰⁵ We have dealt with this nonsense already in chapter 9 in this book.

The CWI leaders also tried to justify their support for "our boys" – i.e. the soldiers of the imperialist British army – by referring to them as *"workers in uniform"*. This was used as an argument to oppose calls that Labor Party Members of Parliament should vote against any war credits since they would leave "our boys" defenseless.⁷⁰⁶

All this is a graphic example that centrism shares a common ground with left-reformism and social-imperialism.

The Cliffite SWP/IST did also not side with Argentina against its „own“ British imperialism but took a neutral position in the war. As we have quoted above, its leadership justified such a social-pacifist position in a war against an oppressed country by claiming that Argentina was supposedly a "sub-imperialist" country.⁷⁰⁷

Hence for these centrists the war between Britain and Argentina over the Malvinas in 1982 was reactionary on both sides. The SWP leadership stated:

"It was neither an anti-colonial struggle nor a struggle between oppressed and oppressor nations. The contending parties were an emergent capitalist country with regional and continental imperialist features, and a longstanding imperialist power

⁷⁰⁴ Peter Taaffe: *The Rise of Militant*, London 1995, Chapter 20 "The Falklands/Malvinas War"

⁷⁰⁵ Peter Taaffe: *The Rise of Militant*, London 1995, Chapter 20 "The Falklands/Malvinas War"

⁷⁰⁶ See *Workers Power: Communism and the test of War. The Left and the Malvinas*; in: *Workers Power* No. 33, June 1982

⁷⁰⁷ See Alex Callinicos: *Marxism and Imperialism today*, in: A. Callinicos, J. Rees, C Harman & M. Haynes: *Marxism and the New Imperialism*, London 1994, p. 45

*which, though in marked decline, is still a powerful force. There was not a progressive and a reactionary camp.”*⁷⁰⁸

The SWP leadership managed to deny any anti-colonial aspect in the Malvinas war on the Argentinean side – despite the fact that the Malvinas are obviously only under British control because of its past as having been the biggest colonial empire for a long time and despite the fact that Argentina is obviously a dependent, super-exploited country! By denying the decisive class difference between semi-colonial Argentina and imperialist Britain, the British centrists manage to justify a neutral position. They are opposed to both sides and compare their stand with the position of socialists in World War One, when they also opposed both the Entente and the Central Powers as imperialist camps:

“We are not pacifists, we detest the Galtieri dictatorship, we dismiss the notion that the Argentinian seizure of the Falklands is progressive on anti-colonialist grounds. Nevertheless we believe that, in a war between Britain and Argentina, the defeat of British imperialism is the lesser evil. The main enemy is at home.

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

None of this has much relevance to the Falklands. (...) We are irreconcilably hostile to both governments and both regimes. But we are in Britain and not Argentina and therefore the British government, the British state, is the main enemy for us. (...)

*Lenin and Trotsky and Rosmer and Connolly and MacLean and Debs all said, with appropriate national variations, exactly the same thing. All opposed their “own” government and its war. And they were absolutely right. Support for “one’s own” ruling class in such a war is tantamount to abandoning the struggle for socialism. For their war is a continuation of their politics by other means. And so, exactly, with the War of Thatcher’s Face.”*⁷⁰⁹

The IST leadership rejected the applicability of Trotsky’s anti-imperialist method by remarking on his statement on a potential war between a semi-fascist Brazil and a democratic imperialist Britain – which we quoted above – that *“Leon Trotsky showed some confusion over these matters.”*⁷¹⁰ Unfortunately it is rather the IST, not Trotsky, who is confused on anti-imperialism.

To summarize, the Malvinas War with British imperialism at its centre showed the true social-pacifist or even social-imperialist color of centrist tendencies which have – like the CWI, IMT or IST – their biggest section in Britain. Their policy had nothing to do with the necessary proletarian internationalism which supports the struggles of the oppressed people and which Trotsky considered

⁷⁰⁸ Alex Callinicos: *Marxism and Imperialism today*, pp. 50-51

⁷⁰⁹ Duncan Hallas: *Socialism and war* (1982), *Socialist Review* 82:05, May 1982; <http://www.marxists.org/archive/hallas/works/1982/05/socwar.htm>

⁷¹⁰ Chris Harman: *Analysing Imperialism* (2003); in: *International Socialism* 2:99, Summer 2003, p. 78, <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj99/harman.htm>, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/2003/xx/imperialism.htm>

as the duty of all socialists:

*„Imperialism can exist only because there are backward nations on our planet, colonial and semi-colonial countries. The struggle of these oppressed peoples for national unity and independence has a twofold progressive character, since, on the one hand, it prepares favorable conditions of development for their own use, and on the other, it strikes blows at imperialism. Hence, in part, the conclusion that in a war between a civilized imperialist democratic republic and the backward barbarian monarchy of a colonial country, the socialists will be entirely on the side of the oppressed country, notwithstanding its monarchy, and against the oppressor country, notwithstanding its “democracy”.”*⁷¹¹

ii) The Gulf War in 1991

When the imperialists under the leadership of the USA attacked Iraq in January 1991, the Stalinists played a pathetic role. Most Stalinists supported the UN embargo against Iraq imposed in autumn 1990 and which prepared the imperialist onslaught. They followed the leadership of the Stalinist states. The Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR voted for all UN resolutions concerning the Gulf crisis up to the war in January 1991 including the authorisation of the imperialist armies to attack Iraq. The Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy voted for the imperialist sanctions against Iraq and abstained on the question of war authorisation. The Cuban Stalinist bureaucracy abstained on the question of sanctions (so much for Castro's "anti-imperialism"!) and voted against war authorisation.

However, the main centrist currents in the West also failed again to defend the semi-colonial country. Of course they opposed the war – as nearly all pacifists did too. Of course, they went not so far as the Stalinists did and therefore did not support the imperialist sanctions. But they refused to take a side in the war between the biggest powers on earth and a single classic semi-colonial country.

The CWI leadership justified their abstentionist position by arguing that Saddam Hussein's foreign policy was "aggressive", "expansionist" or even "imperialist" too. For some time they even went so far to claim that Iraq was a "regional imperialist powers" as we have shown in the quote above.⁷¹²

The SWP/IST mentioned a few times before the war started, that they "would be for an American defeat and therefore an Iraqi victory". However, when the war actually started, this pledge was forgotten and the SWP failed to publicly stand for the imperialists defeat by the Iraqi forces.⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ Leo Trotzki: Stalin – Eine Biographie, München 1952, pp. 246-247; in English: Leon: Trotsky: Stalin – An Appraisal of the Man and his Influence (1940), Chapter VI: War and Exile, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/stalin/ch06.htm>

⁷¹² Wolfram Klein: Hintergründe der kolonialen Revolution (1991); in: Die koloniale Revolution, Herausgegeben von Stuttgarter VORAN-Unterstützern (1991), p. 6

⁷¹³ Paul Morris: The Left and the War: The acid test; in: Workers Power No. 139 (February 1991), p. 14

This was obviously the result of the pressure from the left-liberal pacifists and the reformists. Hence the SWP in Britain even refused to fight for the slogan “Troops Out of the Gulf” to become part of the official platform of the “Committee to Stop War in the Gulf” – the main anti-war alliance. They opposed this because it would have endangered their alliance with petty-bourgeois pacifists and labor bureaucrats. They also helped to make sure that no one could speak in defense of Iraq from the platform at the demonstrations and rallies – because this would have shocked the petty-bourgeois allies in the anti-war movement.⁷¹⁴

Trotsky once characterised this fear to break with the bureaucracy and to make unprincipled concessions in order to avoid such a rupture as an essential feature of centrism:

“The left centrists, who are in turn distinguished by a great number of shadings (SAP in Germany, OSP in Holland, ILP in England, the Zyromsky and Marceau Pivert groups in France and others) arrive in words at the renunciation of the defence of the fatherland. But from this bare renunciation they do not draw the necessary practical conclusions. The greater half of their internationalism, if not nine-tenths of it, bears a platonic character. They fear to break away from the right centrists; in the name of the struggle with “sectarianism,” they carry on a struggle against Marxism, refuse to fight for a revolutionary International and continue to remain in the Second International, at the head of which stands the king’s footman, Vandervelde. Expressing at certain moments the leftward shift of the masses, in the final analysis the centrists put a brake upon the revolutionary regrouping within the proletariat and consequently also upon the struggle against war.

*In its very essence, centrism means half-heartedness and vacillation. But the problem of war is least of all favourable for the policy of vacillation. For the masses, centrism is always only a short transition stage. The growing danger of war will make for ever-sharper differentiation within the centrist groupings that now dominate the workers’ movement. The proletarian vanguard will be the better armed for the struggle against war the sooner and more fully it will free its mind from the web of centrism. A necessary condition for success on this road is to pose clearly and irreconcilably all questions connected with war.”*⁷¹⁵

iii) The imperialist War on Terror since 2001

When the imperialist “war on terror” – initiated by the US-administration of George Bush – started, it provoked a world-wide mass movement. Already the imperialist USA/EU attack on Afghanistan in October 2001 met mass opposition. This was however dwarfed by the huge movement which emerged against the threat of the war against Iraq. At its highpoint, 15-20 million people marched on 15th February 2003. Later the Zionist Apartheid state Israel, which

⁷¹⁴ Workers Power (Britain): Anti-War Movement: Where Now?; in: Workers Power No. 139 (February 1991), p. 6

⁷¹⁵ Leon Trotsky: War and the Fourth International (1934); in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34, p. 111

already faced the second Intifada beginning in 2000, launched several wars – first against Hezbollah in Lebanon and later twice against Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 and in November 2012. And in January 2013, French imperialism – with support by the EU and the USA – invaded Mali in the name of “War on Terror”.

Social-Imperialist ex-Stalinists

The Stalinist and ex-Stalinist parties in Europe – most of them are united in the *European Left Party* (ELP) – played a double role. On one hand they participated in the anti-war movement in order to raise their profile and also to spread pacifist ideas and to contain anti-imperialist voices. However, while many rank and file members of these parties honestly participated in these anti-war activities, the leaders of the Communist Parties had a different, cynical calculation. For them anti-war activities were manoeuvres to boost their weight in the political establishment. Where they could enter the capitalist government, they became active supporters of the imperialist war on terror.

For example the *Parti Communiste Français* (*Communist Party of France*, PCF) was part of the Jospin government 1997-2002 which actively participated in the NATO wars against Serbia in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001. In Italy the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* of Fausto Bertinotti too joined the neoliberal government of Prodi and supported the Italian participation in the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan. Such is the “principled opposition” of the “Communist” Parties against imperialist wars and occupations. It is only logical that they collaborated and praised the *Iraqi Communist Party*, which – as we already said – supported the US occupation of Iraq.

Faced with the French imperialist intervention in Mali since 10.1.2013 the PCF demonstrates again its social-imperialism. The PCF – a constituent party of the reformist *European Left Party* as well as of the *Front de Gauche* in France – expressed in their public statements that they “share the goals of the Mali government to defeat the Jihadist terrorists in the North”. These social-democratised ex-Stalinists are cynically worried that the French intervention “might risk a war”, so they “request that the French authorities respond to questions posed by heavy military intervention”.⁷¹⁶ In other words, they are true social-imperialists which implicitly support the war goals of its ruling class. The *Front de Gauche* of Jean-Luc Mélenchon goes even further and explicitly supports the war!

Another example of the social-imperialist policy of the European Left Party is their position on the Zionist Apartheid state Israel. In their official statements they naturally oppose war and occupation. But they support – in classic Stalinist tradition – the existence of the colonial settler state Israel and

⁷¹⁶ See PCF: L' intervention militaire française comporte de grands risques de guerre (12.1.2013), <http://www.pcf.fr/33977>; PCF: C'est le Mali qu'il faut reconstruire, (11.1.2013), <http://www.pcf.fr/33940>

endorse a Palestinian state only in the West Bank and Gaza alongside the much more powerful and richer Israel. Indeed leading figures like Gregor Gysi, the chairman of the German LINKE parliamentary group, proudly refer to the fact that the Stalinist Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia were the first states to recognize Israel during its war of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians in 1948 – the *an-Nakba* as the Arabs call it – and to deliver substantial military aid.⁷¹⁷

The ELP's recognition of Apartheid state Israel's "right to exist" leads it to a refusal to support the Palestinian resistance.⁷¹⁸ It rather takes a neutral position in the decades-long struggle between the imperialist Goliath and the colonial David – a shameful stand for a so-called "Left Party"!

Its pro-Israeli social-imperialist position makes it only natural that it looks to the imperialist Great powers and their United Nations talking shop to solve the "*conflicts in the Middle East*". This could be seen, for example, in various statements that the ELP leadership published during the Gaza war in 2008/09:

*"Fully committed to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the EL calls upon the UN Security Council to adopt concrete measures to end the massacre, lift the blockade, and promote peace on the basis of the UN resolutions."*⁷¹⁹

*"We call the European governments to do its utmost to strive for the immediate interference of the UN to stop the war. The cornerstones for a political solution and the necessary political negotiations, the conditions for such talks – all these aspects are known for a long time – and therefore the EL is demanding from the EU and the EU-countries' governments to play finally an active role in this direction – as voted by large majority in the European Parliament several times."*⁷²⁰

Similarly, the ELP leadership called during and after the Lebanon war – in which it naturally took a neutral position instead of siding with Hezbollah – repeatedly for the creation of an "UN-controlled buffer zone between Israel and Lebanon" and an "international peace-keeping force" of the UN.⁷²¹

While the ELP condemns the Israeli wars, it is also unambiguously in solidarity with the Zionist Apartheid state itself. Indeed important parties like

⁷¹⁷ See Gregor Gysi: Die Haltung der deutschen Linken zum Staat Israel, Vortrag von Dr. Gregor Gysi auf einer Veranstaltung „60 Jahre Israel“ der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung am 14.4.2008, http://www.juedische.at/TCgi/_v2/TCgi.cgi?target=home&Param_Kat=3&Param_RB=33&Param_Red=9722

⁷¹⁸ See e.g. EL Executive Board meeting: The ELP condemns the violent escalation by the Israel government in Gaza strip and urges the EU to recognize the state of Palestine, Copenhagen, 2012-11-17/18, http://www.european-left.org/nc/english/home/news_archive/news_archive/zurueck/latest-news-home/artikel/the-elp-condemns-the-violent-escalation-by-the-israel-government-in-gaza-strip-and-urges-the-eu-to-re/

⁷¹⁹ ELP: Ceasefire now! Stop the war!, Berlin, 10 January 2009, http://www.european-left.org/nc/english/news/news_archive/news_archive/zurueck/latest-news-home/artikel/ceasefire-now-stop-the-war-el-mobilize-for-peace/

⁷²⁰ ELP Executive Board Secretariat: Ceasefire now! Stop the war!, Brussels, 29 December 2008

⁷²¹ Europäische Linkspartei: Appell der Europäischen Linken an die Staatsschefs in Europa, 1. August 2006; http://www.european-left.org/Members/mherberg/pressrelease.2006-08-01.7915015341-de?set_language=de&cl=de; see also Gregor Gysi: Krieg ist eine Höchstform von Terror, 19.09.2006, <http://www.linksfraktion.de/rede.php?artikel=1386814495>

the German LINKE repeatedly state that they are in “Solidarity with Israel”. Gregor Gysi stated this repeatedly and even labeled “the solidarity with Israel as a well-founded moral element for the German reason of state”.⁷²²

Leading figures of the ELP like Petra Pau, a leader of the German LINKE and vice-president of the German parliament, and Walter Baier, the Coordinator of the network *transform! Europe* – the Think Tank of the European Left Party – are supporters of the notorious campaign “Stop the Bomb”. This is an aggressive Zionist campaign which demands that the Great Powers pressurize and isolate Iran and includes proponents of a nuclear pre-emptive strike against Iran.⁷²³ This is only a slightly hidden campaign for an imperialist interference and war and it is no accident that it is also supported by famous right-wing extremists like the Dutch politician Leon de Winter.⁷²⁴

During the Gaza war in 2008/09, the chairman of the LINKE in Berlin, Klaus Lederer, joined a demonstration with the slogan “Support Israel - Operation Cast-Lead” and was – alongside with politicians from the other bourgeois parties – one of the main speakers.

The German LINKE even goes so far as to denounce support for a one-state in Palestine, calls to boycott Israeli commodities or the participation in Gaza solidarity convoys and associates them with “Anti-Semitism”. It also declares support for such positions as incompatible with membership in the parliamentary group!⁷²⁵ These positions were adopted in 2011 unanimously by the leadership, respectively the parliamentary group, of the LINKE!

As a particular disgusting form of cynicism, the ELP leaders present their pro-Zionism as a form of struggle against Anti-Semitism. It goes without saying that every serious progressive organization must make not the slightest concession

⁷²² See Gregor Gysi: Die Haltung der deutschen Linken zum Staat Israel, Vortrag von Dr. Gregor Gysi auf einer Veranstaltung „60 Jahre Israel“ der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung am 14.4.2008, http://www.juedische.at/TCgi/_v2/TCgi.cgi?target=home&Param_Kat=3&Param_RB=33&Param_Red=9722

⁷²³ See the campaign's website <http://stopthebomb.net>. Their call in German language can be found here: http://www.stopthebomb.net/img/anzeige_falter.pdf. A report in a bourgeois daily paper about a public meeting of this campaign in which a call for a nuclear pre-emptive strike against Iran was issued can be found here: András Szigetvari: Kriegsdrohungen aus dem Hörsaal, DER STANDARD, 5.5.2008, <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=3325059>

⁷²⁴ We have published various statements on the shameful support of ELP politicians for this war-mongering campaign. See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: KPÖ-Baier unterstützt neokonservative Anti-Iran-Kampagne. Wie tief kann man sinken? Kommentar zur Unterstützung des KPÖ-Funktionärs Walter Baier für die neokonservative „STOP THE BOMB“-Kampagne gegen den Iran (2007), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/phpwcms/index.php?id=25,348,0,0,1,0>; Michael Pröbsting: Atomkriegstreiber hetzen auf der Wiener Universität: Es ist höchste Zeit, den antinationalen Kriegshetzern Einhalt zu gebieten! 30.10.2008, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/phpwcms/index.php?id=25,436,0,0,1,0>

⁷²⁵ See LINKE weist Antisemitismus-Vorwürfe zurück. Der Parteivorstand der LINKEN hat am 21. Mai 2011 ohne Gegenstimmen die folgende Erklärung verabschiedet: <http://www.die-linke.de/partei/organe/parteivorstand/parteivorstand20102012/beschluesse/linkeweistantisemitismusvorwuerfezurueck/>; Parliamentary Group of the LINKE: Entschieden gegen Antisemitismus, 8. Juni 2011, <http://www.die-linke.de/nc/dielinke/nachrichten/detail/artikel/entschieden-gegen-antisemitismus>

to Anti-Semitism and fight against any such sentiments. That's why we always say that we fight against Zionism and the Apartheid state Israel, not against the Jewish people in Israel. However, confusing Anti-Zionism with Anti-Semitism is nothing but a capitulation to imperialism and Zionism.

What is the reason for this reactionary position of the LINKE which is even more right-wing than that of other parties in the ELP (of which some deputies participated in the Gaza solidarity convoys)? The reason is simply that German imperialism has a very close relationship with Israel. It is impossible for a party to become part of a government without an unambiguously pro-Israel position. Since joining a coalition government is the strategic goal of the LINKE, they must prove to the other parties that they are prepared to sacrifice international solidarity with the Palestinian people. Decisions like those mentioned above are steps in this direction. There is no doubt that the LINKE will drop much more formal internationalist positions if the time comes to achieve some posts in a government.

So, we see with the examples of Germany, France and Italy that the ex-Stalinists of the ELP are against wars but support them if that is the price for a place in the capitalist government.

The IST's specific Form of Opportunism

Given the fact that in opposite to the Malvinas War, a mass movement against the Iraq war existed in Britain, it was easier for the British-centred centrist Internationals to talk more leftist against imperialism and war. However, again, the centrists failed to take a principled anti-imperialist stand. The SWP certainly was an important force in organising the "Stop the War" coalition and mobilising mass demonstrations. But while they adapted opportunistically to Muslim business leaders, they failed to openly call for the defeat of the imperialist forces and the military victory of the Afghan forces, which were under the leadership of the Taliban.

They follow the same policy of platonic anti-imperialism in Mali in 2013: Similar to the centrist French *New Anticapitalist Party* (NPA), they oppose the French intervention but fail to call for their defeat and for the military victory of the Islamist rebels.⁷²⁶

Surely, the SWP/IST sometimes gave/gives platonic statements of support for

⁷²⁶ See: Ken Olende (SWP): French attack on Mali is an imperialist venture, <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30307>; Rulers' racism masks imperialist war in Mali, <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30351>, both articles were published as Editorials in Socialist Worker Issue: 2336, 19.1.2013; SWP: Thousands of French troops in 'total reconquest' of Mali, Socialist Worker Issue: 2337, 26 January 2013, <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30390>; Ken Olende (SWP): Cameron joins France's imperialist war in Mali, Socialist Worker Issue: 2338, 2 February 2013, <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30455>. See also the NPA Statement: NO! to the French military intervention in Mali, 14 January 2013, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/sip.php?article2862>

the defence of Afghanistan or Iraq against the imperialist occupation in their press. This certainly makes them more left-wing than the open social-pacifists like the CWI, IMT or the British *Alliance for Workers Liberty* (AWL). However, the IST's support for the resistance of the Afghan and Iraqi people, respectively, does not go beyond this or that side-note in an article and doesn't appear in the headlines, or the thousands of posters it regularly distributes at demonstrations, etc. Worse, they would even oppose it to be raised in motions at conferences of the Stop the War Coalition. They even opposed slogans like "*Troops Out Now*" to become part of the platform of the Coalition. In short, their opposition against the war was always marked by a gross opportunism, by political adaption towards the labour bureaucracy, left liberal sectors of the bourgeoisie and – in Britain – the formation of the popular-frontist political party RESPECT together with Muslim business men.

The SWP's opportunist orientation towards these layers was expressed in encoded form in a statement of the then-SWP leader John Rees: "*The Stop the War Coalition committed itself to the central issue of opposing the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq and, by extension, the 'war on terror' of which they were a part. ... Around these aims traditional peace campaigners, Labour, Liberal and Green party members, trade unionists, Muslims, socialists, anti-globalisation activists and many others with no previous organisational affiliations could all agree to organise. Attempts to narrow the campaign so that it adopted specifically anti-imperialist objectives, thus potentially excluding pacifists or those simply opposed to this war for particular reasons or, most importantly, those just coming into the movement who had not had the opportunity to become anti-imperialists on principle were rejected.*"⁷²⁷

Of course it is correct to organize united front campaigns on a limited platform. We have always rejected criticism of ultra-leftists who demand to organize a broad united front on a full anti-imperialist platform including the call for defeat for imperialism. However as principled it is to collaborate in such a united front, it is the duty of Marxists to openly argue in their agitation and propaganda for revolutionary positions – including the defeat of imperialism and the support for the anti-colonial resistance – and to fight for the right to have speakers, etc. for the consistent anti-imperialist viewpoints on united front demonstrations.

The SWP leaders have a different approach. Their appetite to find allies amongst the labour bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeoisie led them even so far to give Charles Kennedy, the leader of the open bourgeois Liberal Democratic party (today the coalition partner of the Tories!) a platform at the biggest anti-war demonstration on 15th February 2003. Kennedy of course became an open supporter of the imperialist war only a few weeks later!

Another example of the SWP's gross opportunism in practice is their role in a

⁷²⁷ John Rees: *Imperialism and Resistance*, Routledge, 2006, p. 225, quoted in: Alec Abbott, *Kautskyism past and present*, Volume 1: *Modern-day Kautskyism* (2007), p. 21, <http://www.rosclar.webspace.virginmedia.com>

shameful incident at the European Social Forum in October 2004. The organizers – including the SWP – invited Sobhi Al-Mashadani, the general secretary of the Iraq Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and a member of the Iraqi Communist Party to speak at a major session during the ESF. His party supported the US occupation of Iraq and was part of the colonial puppet government. Mashadani himself argued a few weeks before in favor of continuing the imperialist occupation and against calls for withdrawal. His presence on the platform was widely condemned – including by George Galloway – and together with a number of Iraqi activists we protested at the beginning of the planned debate against the presence of this supporter of imperialist occupation on the platform. In the end Mashadani left without a speech, but we were strongly denounced for our protest by the SWP leaders who feared for their cozy relations with the bureaucrats.

How to fight for anti-imperialist Position and how not to fight for it

Let us give a concrete example for the contrast between the Marxist and the opportunist approach to the united front policy in the struggle against the imperialist war. In 2006 we initiated in Austria a united front to protest the visit of the then US president Bush in Vienna on 21st June. Our youth organisation was central in organizing a school student strike in which 2,000 school students participated. In the evening of the same day about 25,000 people marched through the city.⁷²⁸

Our comrades, who spoke from the platform both during the school student strike and at the demonstration in the evening – among them today RCIT leader Nina Gunić – openly called for the defeat of US imperialism and Israel, for the victory of the Iraqi resistance and the Palestinian Intifada and for international working class solidarity. During the mobilization campaign, which lasted several months, the united front split into two alliances. One was called BUSH GO HOME, in which our organization participated together with a number of other left-wing and migrant groups and of which the author of this book was a spokesperson. The other was called STOP BUSH and was centred around the social democratic youth organization and the Communist Party. The issue of the split was that the reformists categorically opposed to allow speakers which stood for a consistent anti-imperialist viewpoint. They therefore categorically opposed that al-Kalemji, a spokesperson of the Iraqi Resistance, or myself, Michael Pröbsting, could speak from the platform at the demonstration in the evening. In the end we demonstrated together but had separate rallies at the beginning and the end of the demonstration, so that thousands of people could

⁷²⁸ For more on this see Michael Pröbsting: Austria: Vienna was anti-Bush city!, 24.06.2006, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/austria-vienna-was-anti-bush-city>

hear the voices of the anti-imperialists at our rallies.⁷²⁹

Characteristically, the Austrian section of the IST joined the alliance of the social democratic youth and supported their refusal to allow anti-imperialist speakers. Formally this seemed to be contradictory: In their paper the Clifftites spoke positively about the Iraqi resistance but at the same time they supported the reformist's rejection to have a speaker from the same Iraqi resistance at a demonstration. But this is a contradiction only on the surface. The IST's anti-imperialist principles are subordinated to their drive to find allies amongst the

⁷²⁹ We have become hate figures for pro-Zionist, reformist and "Anti-German" forces because of the consistent anti-imperialist position and practice of our organization. The author of this book was already sentenced by the bourgeois court in 2006 for participation in anti-imperialist activities, which disrupted a meeting of pro-Zionist forces who called for war against Iran. A united front call in solidarity with Michael Pröbsting can be found here: Gegen die Kriminalisierung der demokratischen und antiimperialistischen Kräfte! Für das Recht auf Meinungsfreiheit! (April 2006) http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/unterstuetzung_proebsting.html;

The then chairman of the Communist Party, Walter Baier, published an article in the leading conservative daily paper in Austria "Die Presse" in which he called Michael Pröbsting "a star of the anti-imperialist scene" and associated him with "left-wing Anti-Semitism". (Walter Baier: Können Linke antisemitisch sein? Antiintellektualistische und antisemitische Ressentiments haben auch in der Linken eine lange Geschichte; 30. 8. 2006, <http://www.gegendenantisemitismus.at/00092006.php>) Today Walter Baier is the Coordinator of the network *transform! Europe* – the Think Tank of the European Left Party.

During the Gaza War in November 2012, the RKOB (Austrian section of the RCIT) played an active and leading role in organizing protest rallies and demonstrations. As a result, the Zionist forces charged one of our leading comrades, Johannes Wiener, with "sedition". The reasons given for the charge are parts of a speech he gave at a Pro-Palestine rally on 16.11.2012 in Vienna, in which he called for the support of the Intifada, for solidarity with the armed and unarmed resistance and for a single state in the whole of Palestine from the river to the sea. We initiated a national and international solidarity campaign and the charges were dropped. More on the background of this charge and the solidarity campaign for him can be found on the RCIT website:

Victory! The Charge against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener has been dropped!

Austria: Israelite Cultus Community suffers defeat in its attack on Free Speech and Palestine Solidarity, Statement of the RKOB, 10.1.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/solidarity-with-wiener-won>; Austria: Israelite Cultus Community attempts to criminalize partisanship for the Palestinian Resistance! Charge of "Sedition" against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener is a Pretext for Attack on Freedom of Expression, Statement of the RKOB, 20.12.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/no-criminalization-of-solidarity-with-palestine>; Austria: Pro-Israeli War-Mongers try to throw 20-year old Palestine Solidarity Activist into Prison. RKOB spokesperson Johannes Wiener is accused of „sedition“ because of a Pro-Palestine speech during the Gaza War, Statement of the RKOB, 13.12.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/no-to-criminalization-of-rcit-activist>; Statements in Solidarity with RCIT Activist Johannes Wiener, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/solidarity-with-johannes-wiener>. A number of reports of the Austrian RCIT section's work during the Gaza war have been published on this website too.

The pathetic role of the Zionist "Anti-Germans" which acts as a battering ram against the anti-imperialist left is pretty well known. This however unfortunately does not stop left-wing associations like "Platypus" in the USA to give such reactionaries a platform. See for example Stephan Grigat: To know the worst: Anti-Semitism and the failure of the Left on Iran, *Platypus Review* 49, September 2012, <http://platypus1917.org/2012/09/01/anti-semitism-and-failure-of-left-on-iran/>. In this rant the author, a lecture at the Viennese university and a supporter of the campaign to criminalize our comrades, associates Michael Pröbsting with "Anti-Semitism".

labour bureaucracy and the left liberal intelligentsia. If they can find such allies – at least temporarily – they are prepared to sell all principles of the working class program.

In Britain this opportunism led to the consequences that the SWP leaders avoided consistent anti-imperialist slogans from the platform at demonstrations as well as practical actions which would enrage their allies in the labour bureaucracy and the Muslim community leaders. They therefore let the situation slip in February/March 2003 when the mass protest could have been transformed into mass resistance against the imperialist war. Any proposals for strikes against the war or the building of action councils would have endangered their bureaucratic friendships with their reformist allies.⁷³⁰

Instead of a principled united front with reformists and Muslim community leaders, the SWP/IST leadership preferred to build the petty-bourgeois, popular-frontist party RESPECT together with the former Labour MP George Galloway and Muslim business men and on the basis of a reformist program.⁷³¹

IST policy: Give us some Posts and we stop fighting for our Principles

We said before that the IST's anti-imperialist principles are subordinated to their drive to find allies amongst the labour bureaucracy and the left liberal intelligentsia. Let us give another example for this. In Germany the IST has been part of the LINKE – the German section of the European Left Party – for many years. They have a number of positions in regional, the central leadership and the parliamentary apparatus as well as two deputies in the federal parliament – Christine Buchholz and Nicole Gohlke. As we reported above the LINKE leadership stated explicitly their solidarity with Israel and prohibited its functionaries support for a one-state in Palestine, calls to boycott Israeli commodities or the participation in Gaza solidarity convoys. As we also reported these decisions were adopted unanimously.

The question arises how such unanimity is possible since a number of IST members are in the leadership and the parliamentary group of this party. The reason is simply that the German IST leaders don't dare to vote against these reactionary pro-Zionist resolutions! Why don't they dare? Because it would mean, most likely, the immediate end of their toleration in the top ranks of the party by the reformist bureaucracy. This is what they – in encoded words – admit themselves publicly.

In a statement, the two German IST deputies Nicole Gohlke und Christine Buchholz wrote:

⁷³⁰ See Dave Stockton: The People's Assembly – a missed opportunity; in: Workers Power No. 274, April 2003, p. 5

⁷³¹ For a detailed analysis and critique of the RESPECT party project of the SWP see Luke Cooper: The Road to Respect: The SWP'S march to the right; in: Fifth International Vol. 1, No. 3, (2005)

*"The decision (in the parliamentary group, MP) was taken unanimously. However, this 'unanimity' was achieved because approval for this was made indirectly a question of survival. Against this background have those deputies, who initially announced that they would vote against the resolution, have acted differently: some have left the room and therefore did not take part in the vote, others were present but did not participate in the vote and other voted reluctantly for the resolution. We have decided to leave the room. (...) Like many others in the parliamentary group we found ourselves in a tactical and political dilemma: should we have prevented a politically wrong decision and risk the split of the parliamentary group around a question, on which the left in Germany acts out of the defensive and which has become one of the most important points of attack by the bourgeois media and the competing parties? For us, it continues to be true, that the LINKE is the only party, which consistently opposes capitalism and war and therefore plays an internationally unique role. The price, to ruin this project, was too high."*⁷³²

⁷³² Letter from Nicole Gohlke und Christine Buchholz, reproduced at http://www.palaestina-portal.eu/kampagnenjournalismus_hasbara_jagd_auf_die_linke-2.htm (our translation)

The complete letter in German language original:

„Nicole Gohlke und Christine Buchholz. - Liebe Freundinnen und Freunde der Friedens- und Antikriegsbewegung, Liebe Bündnispartner/innen, Wahrscheinlich haben mittlerweile schon alle von der am letzten Dienstag gefassten Erklärung der Linksfraktion gehört oder gelesen - viele von Euch haben uns in den letzten Tagen angeschrieben oder angerufen - der Unmut und die Irritationen, die dieser Beschluss ausgelöst hat, sind beträchtlich. Zu recht. Die Erklärung ist deswegen so problematisch und aus unserer Sicht politisch falsch, weil er durch seine Überschrift und durch seine Kontextualisierung wichtige Aktivitäten der Palästina-Solidaritätsarbeit in den Zusammenhang mit Antisemitismus stellt.

Der Beschluss wurde einstimmig gefasst. Diese „Einstimmigkeit“ kam allerdings nur dadurch zustande, weil die Zustimmung indirekt zur Überlebensfrage der Fraktion gemacht wurde.

Vor diesem Hintergrund haben sich diejenigen Abgeordneten, die zunächst angekündigt hatten, gegen die Erklärung stimmen zu wollen, unterschiedlich verhalten: einige haben die Sitzung verlassen und somit gar nicht an der Abstimmung teilgenommen, andere waren zwar anwesend, haben aber nicht mitgestimmt, wieder andere haben zähneknirschend zugestimmt. Wir haben uns entschieden, den Raum zu verlassen.

Während der mehrstündigen und sehr emotional geführten Fraktionsdebatte begründeten die Kritiker/innen der Erklärung ihre Kritik damit,

- dass sie eine politisch verheerende Gleichsetzung oder zumindest Vermischung von Antisemitismus und Israel-Kritik betreibe,

- dass die Erklärung der in Zusammenarbeit von bürgerlicher Presse und antideutsch geprägten Gruppierungen in und um der LINKEN initiierten Kampagne gegen die LINKE, die die Partei als antisemitisch denunziert, Vorschub leiste,

- dass sie letztlich den Charakter eines Unvereinbarkeitsbeschlusses trage - auch vor dem Hintergrund, dass auch die Mitarbeiter/innen der Fraktion und die persönlichen Mitarbeiter/innen der einzelnen MdB aufgefordert werden, sich entsprechend zu verhalten,

- und schließlich dass sie insgesamt dem Charakter einer pluralen LINKEN zuwider laufe.

Wir bedauern und kritisieren daher, dass und wie es zu dem Beschluss gekommen ist. Wir wollen aber auch gerade Euch gegenüber betonen, dass wir froh sind, dass es so viele kritische Stimmen in der Fraktion gab, und dass ohne den massiven Druck des Vorstandes die Erklärung so nicht verabschiedet worden wäre.

Wie viele andere in der Fraktion befanden wir uns in einem taktischen und politischen Dilemma: verhindern wir einen politisch falschen Beschluss und riskieren wir eine Spaltung der Fraktion an einer Frage, in der die Linke aus der Defensive heraus agiert, und die zu einer der wichtigsten Angriffspunkte der bürgerlichen Medien und der konkurrierenden Parteien geworden ist?

Für uns ist weiterhin richtig, dass die LINKE die einzige Partei ist, die sich konsequent gegen Kapitalismus und Krieg stellt und so eine im internationalen Maßstab einmalige Rolle spielt. Der Preis, dieses Projekt an die

This letter is pathetic and unmasking in several ways. First, the IST authors claim that prevention of this pro-Zionist resolution would have “*risks the split of the parliamentary group*”. If this is true it shows that the IST prefers keeping unity with the reformist bureaucrats compared with a vote against a pro-Zionist denunciation of the Palestinian liberation struggle. In fact, as a report based on inside information reveals, the pro-Zionist leadership had a clear majority for their resolution anyway, but there were about 15 (out of 76) deputies, who didn’t want to vote for the resolution. The pro-Zionist leadership threatened to resign from its post and to leave the parliamentary group if the vote was not unanimous.⁷³³ As a result every single oppositional LINKE deputy caved in and either left the room or didn’t vote at all. They – including the IST deputies – couldn’t bear the responsibility of having “pushed” the pro-Zionist leadership

Wand zu fahren ist sehr hoch. Und für uns ist richtig, dass wir in diesem Sinne um eine internationalistische und antikapitalistische Ausrichtung der LINKEN kämpfen müssen. Wir wissen aber auch, dass es insbesondere die außenpolitischen Positionen sind, an denen der Anpassungsdruck auf linke Parteien im Sinne der „Regierungsfähigkeit“ am stärksten und als erstes entsteht, und dass für uns gelten muss, unser taktisches Dilemma aufzulösen, weil wir uns sonst schlicht erpressbar machen.

Hierbei ist wichtig zu wissen:

- Die Mehrheitsverhältnisse in der Partei sind anders als in der Fraktion. Der Verlauf der Programmdebatte, aber auch viele Aktivitäten in den verschiedenen Gliederungen der Partei machen deutlich, dass die LINKE unmissverständlich an der Seite der Friedensbewegung steht, und dass die Haltung, keinerlei Kriegseinsätzen zuzustimmen nicht zur Disposition steht.

Statt der Aufgabe oder der Anpassung von politischen Positionen mit Blick auf eine mögliche Regierungsbeteiligung 2013 diskutiert die Mehrheit der Partei die stärkere Profilbildung gegenüber den in der Oppositionsrolle rhetorisch linker auftretenden SPD und Grünen.

- Die Fraktion wird sich in den nächsten Monaten und Wochen weiter mit dem Nahost-Konflikt auseinandersetzen haben, weil absehbar mehrere Ereignisse der Palästina-Solidarität Aufwind verleihen werden: Der arabische Frühling verleiht auch dem palästinensischen Widerstand - auch jenseits von Fatah und Hamas - neue Hoffnung. Die Aktionen des zivilen Ungehorsams an der Grenze zu Syrien, die die israelische Regierung derzeit mit der grausamen Erschießung vor allem junger entschlossener Aktivist/innen beantwortet, sind ein erstes Zeichen dafür.

Im September soll ein palästinensischer Staat ausgerufen werden. Auf der selben Sitzung auf der der oben genannte Beschluss gefällt wurde, wurde ein Antrag beschlossen, in dem wir die Bundesregierung auffordern, den neuen Staat anzuerkennen. Hierfür werden wir streiten. Zugleich müssen wir die aufkommenden Probleme (Weigerung Israels, weitere Zersiedelung des Westjordanlands, etc.) kritisch begleiten, weil nicht unwahrscheinlich ist, dass die Staatsgründung an der Haltung Israels scheitern wird.

Und nicht zuletzt ist die internationale Palästina-Solidaritäts-Bewegung überaus aktiv: Ende des Monats startet auch unter Beteiligung Linker Europa Abgeordneter eine neue Flotille, die die Blockade des Gaza-Streifens durchbrechen will; am 08. Juli werden internationale Aktivist/innen versuchen mit der Aktion „Willkommen in Palästina“ mit gewaltlosem zivilem Ungehorsam die Einreise nach Palästina am Ben Gurion Flughafen zu erstreiten.

Natürlich werden wir und viele andere in der Fraktion weiterhin dafür streiten, dass die LINKE hier eine klare Haltung einnehmen muss, wenn sie glaubwürdig bleiben will. Doch nicht zuletzt brauchen wir Euch dabei, wenn es darum geht, die LINKE als Bündnispartnerin und Sprachrohr der Friedensbewegung weiterhin zu etablieren. Euer Engagement und Eure Aktivitäten sind Rückendeckung in der innerparteilichen Auseinandersetzung um die Ausrichtung der Partei. Darum auch ein Appell an Euch: lasst die Linksfraktion weiter wissen, was Eure Anregungen für das Engagement der LINKEN für einen gerechten Frieden in Nahost sind. Mit solidarischen Grüßen, Nicole Gohlke und Christine Buchholz.“

⁷³³ See Bruno Engelin: Linkspartei - Einstimmig mit Abweichlern. Bundestagsfraktion streitet über Antisemitismusbeschluss, 16.06.2011, <http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/10595>

into resignation! The IST deputies proved their loyalty to party bureaucracy and subordinated to this pro-Zionist decision: since then they haven't expressed in public their support for a one-state solution and didn't participate in the Gaza flotilla (as deputies of ELP parties in other countries did).

Let us compare this cowardly attitude with other Marxist deputies: The German left-wing socialist deputies Karl Liebknecht and later Otto Rühle voted in 1914 (Rühle on 20.3.1915) against the war credits – in contrast to the rest of the social democratic parliamentary group which supported the war efforts of German imperialism. Several of them were opposed to the war in their hearts but they subordinated to the party discipline and voted for the war credits. Imagine, what Liebknecht and Rühle would have done if they would have applied the IST method! Certainly, voting against the war credits *“risked the split of the parliamentary group”*. But in opposite to the IST leaders, they didn't care about this. They put their principles above wrong loyalty to imperialism. Buchholz and Gohlke state that on the question of Israel *“the left in Germany acts out of the defensive and which has become one of the most important points of attack by the bourgeois media and the competing parties”*. Well, Liebknecht and Rühle certainly felt more pressure than the IST deputies, they certainly acted more *“out of the defensive”* and their opposition to the imperialist war certainly had become much more *“one of the most important points of attack by the bourgeois media and the competing parties”*. But contrary to the IST deputies, Liebknecht and Rühle remained loyal to their anti-imperialist principles and to Marxism in general.

Characteristically, the IST deputies began to adapt to the pro-Zionist pressure already years before the mentioned resolution of the LINKE leadership in 2011. IST deputy Nicole Gohlke published an article in 2009, in which she characterized a two-state solution as *“preferable”*. She noted only that she has *“doubts”* if Israel is prepared to accept *“a fair and just two-state solution”*.⁷³⁴

All this is a terrible sham for so-called *“revolutionary Marxists”*! The IST deputies Buchholz and Gohlke have, as deputies at least for four years, a perfect platform to agitate for solidarity with the Palestinian resistance and the smashing of the Israeli Apartheid state. Such an agitation would be heard by literally millions of people in Germany and around the world. Of course, they would most likely be immediately thrown out of the LINKE parliamentary group, remain deputies without a parliamentary group (like for example the left-reformist but certainly less cowardly RESPECT deputy George Galloway

⁷³⁴ Nicole Gohlke: Palästina-Solidarität heute; in: Der Israel/Palästina-Konflikt als Thema der politischen Bildung – Beiträge einer Arbeitstagung des Kurt-Eisner-Vereins – rls in Bayern, Studienreihe Zivilgesellschaftliche Bewegungen – Institutionalisierte Politik Nr.10/2009, p.16. The German language original: *„Wenn Staatenlösungen für Israel und Palästina diskutiert werden, wenn ein Zwei-Staaten-Konzept als wünschenswert konzipiert wird, bleibt immer zu fragen: Ist Israel bereit seine Grenzen zu definieren? Ist Israel bereit, auf eine weitere Expansion zu verzichten? So sehr eine faire und gleichberechtigte Zwei-Staaten-Lösung zu begrüßen ist, sind Zweifel an diesen Punkten bezüglich der israelischen Haltung angebracht.“*

in Britain) and they would face a hate campaign by the bourgeois, pro-Zionist media. And they would also, most likely, not have the chance to be nominated again as LINKE candidates at the next parliamentary elections. However since such positions are not a goal in itself for revolutionaries, it is certainly a price worth paying. Why? Because bold speeches by members of parliament in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance and against the existence of an Apartheid state would arouse mass sympathy in the whole world, it would give courage to build a mass movement in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance, etc. We mention here only the question of Palestine but it goes without saying that the IST similarly failed to take a consistent revolutionary policy on all other political questions of the class struggle in these years.

Superficially, these behaviors of the German IST deputies are in open contradiction to the IST statements on Palestine. Did the IST not repeatedly call in their papers for a one state solution in Palestine; did they not express their solidarity with the Gaza flotilla etc.?! Of course they did. For their radical supporters, for a militant audience, the IST is always willing to raise radical slogans. But if such slogans would endanger the final goal – recognition and incorporation as a junior partner of the labor bureaucracy – the IST leaders don't waste a second thought about dropping these slogans and subordinating themselves to the demands of the bureaucracy. This spirit of liquidationism and capitulationism becomes particularly obvious in the IST's opportunist approach to entrism in reformist parties.

The ex-Stalinist bureaucracy of the LINKE certainly rewards the loyalty of the IST leaders. In January 2013 Nicole Gohlke was nominated by the party leadership as one of the top 8 LINKE candidates for the coming federal elections.⁷³⁵ What a classic example that centrism adapts to the reformist bureaucracy and gets corrupted by the bourgeois state!

Trotsky once remarked that such a sort of political double-bookkeeping is characteristic of centrism:

*“The correspondence between words and deeds is a distinguishing mark of a serious revolutionary organization. For a serious revolutionary organization, the resolutions it adopts at its assemblies are not mere formalities, but the recorded result of the experiences it has accumulated in action, and a guide for its action in the future. For the centrists, a ‘revolutionary’ thesis, adopted on a ceremonial occasion, is meant to serve as a deceptive decoration, as a cover for irreconcilable divergences in their own ranks, as a cloak for their non-revolutionary deeds in the preceding period as well as in the period to come.”*⁷³⁶

All these examples reveal the following: The reformists sell their political

⁷³⁵ See Nicole Gohlke: Persönliches Statement von Nicole Gohlke zur Nominierung ins LINKE Spitzenteam zur Bundestagswahl, 23.1.2013, <http://www.nicole-gohlke.de/index.php/politik/die-linke/404-persoennesliches-statement-von-nicole-gohlke-zur-nominierung-ins-linke-spitzenteam-zur-bundestagswahl>

⁷³⁶ Leon Trotsky: Resolution on the Antiwar Congress of the London Bureau (1936), in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 100

principles to the bourgeoisie in exchange for government posts and privileges. The centrists have the same petty-bourgeois merchant mentality. They sell their political principles to the labor bureaucracy and the academic state apparatus in exchange for one or another position in a reformist party, the parliament or in the universities. No doubt, the centrists are cheaper than the reformists. But since the former are usually smaller in numbers than the latter, this is hardly surprising.

CWI and their Capitulation to Imperialism

The CWI demonstrates their adaption to the labor bureaucracy since the start of the imperialists' "War on terror" by refusing to call for the defeat of the Great Powers and their allies and for the victory of the forces that fight them. As we will see, they pursue such a social-pacifist policy in a more open, unhidden way than, for example, the IST.

In 2002, the CWI leading figure, Peter Taaffe, presented their method in a long article. He explained that because of the supposed different consciousness of the working class, Marxists cannot raise the same anti-imperialist principled positions in colonial wars as the Trotskyists did in the 1930s. He argues that the masses in 1930s had much more sympathy for the Ethiopian kingdom than for the Taliban. Therefore, Taaffe concludes, the Fourth International was correct to defend the Ethiopian resistance under the leadership of the reactionary Haile Selassie regime. Today, however, workers in the imperialist countries would not understand defending the Afghan resistance under the reactionary Taliban leadership and hence Marxists – i.e. the CWI – should limit themselves to platonic opposition to war and occupation:

*"The masses in the 1930s would have understood little of the precise detail of the Haile Selassie regime. Moreover, Ethiopia was under attack by the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini at the time Trotsky was writing. Given the democratic illusions of the working class of Europe or the US in particular, together with the recent bloody example of what fascism would mean for them in the coming to power of Adolf Hitler and Mussolini, it was natural that the sympathies of the masses in the 1930s would be with Ethiopia against fascist Italy. The British and most of the European bourgeoisie together with the US, for their own imperialist strategic interests, also played on this sympathy for Ethiopia. It is nonsense to imply, however, as the sectarian organisations do by quoting these remarks of Trotsky, that the mass of the populations in most industrialised countries could take the same attitude today towards bin Laden and the Taliban."*⁷³⁷

Readers will probably see the similarity to the CWI argumentation at the time of the Malvinas war in 1982: British workers would not understand slogans like "Down with the war!", they would not understand a failure to defend the settler

⁷³⁷ Peter Taaffe: Afghanistan, Islam and the Revolutionary Left (2002), <http://www.socialistworld.net/pubs/afghanistan/afghanchp1.html>

“Falklanders” and certainly would not a support for the Argentine’s attempt to take back the islands. Hence, according to the CWI logic, it must not raise any consistent slogans against the British war and should even promise to continue the war “on a socialist basis” when the Labour Party comes to power.

Therefore, the CWI leader states unambiguously: *“To call baldly and crudely for the ‘defeat of US imperialism’ and its coalition allies as an agitational slogan is wrong.”*

Naturally, the CWI is faced with the problem that its position is in complete and obvious contrast to all statements of Lenin’s Communist International and Trotsky’s Fourth International about imperialist wars in the colonial world. So they claim that “in principle” they support the resistance of oppressed people against imperialism, but not the struggles of those, who are actually putting the resistance into practice. This is a model for “platonic anti-imperialism”: Resistance against imperialist occupation? Yes, of course, “in principle”. Support for those, who are fighting the imperialist occupation in Afghanistan, in Iraq or Palestine today? No, never, they are reactionary and workers in the West wouldn’t understand. This is the shameful policy of the CWI, as the following quotes from the same CWI document show:

“We clearly differentiate between the advanced imperialist countries and those in the colonial or the neo-colonial world. In general we still support the peoples in the neo-colonial world in the struggle against imperialist domination, particularly when this takes on the form, as it did in Afghanistan, of military intervention. In this case we were clearly on the side of the Afghani people and in the imperialist countries we opposed the war. Support for the Afghani people and their resistance against the armed incursions of imperialism is not the same as support for the Taliban, even if this support is ‘critical’, as some left organisations have posed it.”

So, Taaffe contrasts the CWI policy to those of principled anti-imperialists like our organization:

„If, therefore, we perceive this war as thoroughly reactionary on the part of imperialism, does this mean that we throw in our lot, albeit ‘critically’, with those who have allegedly ‘resisted’ the US juggernaut, namely bin Laden, his al-Qa’ida and the Taliban government? Unbelievably, this is the position of some small Trotskyist groups, such as Workers Power (our predecessor organization, MP) and the Morenoite LIT. The latter is largely based in Latin America. Their approach will find absolutely no echo amongst the world working class, particularly the proletariat in the developed capitalist countries. Nevertheless, because they utilised some of the past writings of Trotsky to justify their position during the war they could, and did in some instances, confuse and befuddle some young people and workers who came into contact with them. It is necessary, therefore, to deal with their arguments here as a means of clarifying the issues within our own ranks. They also show utter confusion on developments within ‘Islam’.”

It is only consistent that the CWI not only failed to support the Afghan resistance against imperialist occupation but also the resistance in Iraq, in

Lebanon in 2006 and in Palestine in 2008/09 and 2012 against Israel as well as in Mali in 2013.⁷³⁸ Lenin's emphasis in his report about the Thesis on the National and the Colonial Questions at the Second World Congress of the Communist International is completely alien to the CWI method: „*What is the cardinal idea underlying our theses? It is the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations.*“⁷³⁹

Therefore, when the CWI sometimes slip in a little sentence like “*We support the right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves*”, it is nothing but a meaningless phrase. First, it is nothing but imperialist arrogance to allow the oppressed people “the right” to defend themselves. Secondly, it does not clearly state that an organization is committed to support this resistance and to call for mass support for it. Thirdly, as we said above, such formulations are intended to cover the fact that the CWI actually does not support the resistance which is coming from Hamas and other Islamists against Israel but which is the concrete form of Palestinian resistance today.

The IMT – which share the same method with the CWI – has a similar cowardly, social-pacifist approach. This is both true for the wars in Palestine as well as in Mali.⁷⁴⁰

To illustrate this point, we want to give the reader the following example. Let us imagine that we are not dealing with the Palestinian resistance against Israel's state terrorism but with a workers strike in Britain which is organized by a bureaucratic trade union like UNISON (or any other union). This union is forced under the pressure of the fierce attack of the bosses and the militant mood of the workers, to call an indefinite strike from this day on and which takes place in this and that enterprise in the cities X, Y and Z. It is the obvious duty of any revolutionary to support this strike, despite the bureaucratic leadership of the union, to call for the concrete support of this specific strike in all the enterprise and cities where it takes place. Let us now imagine, that the police attack the union leaders – or even tries to kill them. Again, despite all our criticism of the union leaders, only a traitor would deny them the complete and unconditional defence against the police.

Surely, CWI comrades would agree with such an attitude. But when the CWI has to deal with a political and military struggle for national liberation of an

⁷³⁸ See: CWI: Mali: French army intervention will amplify the chaos, 17/01/2013, <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6116>

⁷³⁹ V. I. Lenin: Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions (at the Second Congress of the Communist International 1920); in: LCW 31, p. 240

⁷⁴⁰ See e.g. Communist League of Action (IMT, Morocco): Why Marxists cannot support Islamic fundamentalism – the case of Hamas, 2.10.2007 <http://www.socialist.net/marxists-cannot-support-islamic-fundamentalism-hamas-2.htm>; Walter Leon (IMT): Stop Israel's massacre in Gaza! 31.12.2008, <http://www.marxist.com/stop-israels-massacre-in-gaza.htm>; Socialist Appeal (IMT): Stop Israel's massacre in Gaza! http://www.marxist.com/pdf/gaza_leaflet_sa_jan09.pdf; La Riposte (France, IMT): Imperialist intervention in Mali, 24.1.2013, <http://www.marxist.com/imperialist-intervention-in-mali.htm>; Roberto Sarti (IMT): Mali: The dangerous adventures of Hollande, 25.1.2013 <http://www.marxist.com/mali-the-dangerous-adventures-of-hollande.htm>

oppressed people and not with an economic strike in an imperialist country, they refuse such an unconditional solidarity. Imagine, an organization – faced with a workers strike in Britain – would limit itself to state: “*We support the right of the British workers to strike*” without calling to rally in support for the UNISON led strike on this and that! We would call them traitors. But this is exactly what the CWI is doing with the struggles of the oppressed people if they come into conflict with imperialist powers or their allies! The CWI’s failure in the anti-imperialist duty is a glaring example how a confused, blurred theory leads to a blurred, impotent tactic in the face of imperialist bullying and wars.

Leon Trotsky made a similar point when he remarked: “... *it is a bad Marxist who tries to fix common rules for imperialist France and colonial China. Not to distinguish oppressor countries from oppressed countries is the same as not to distinguish between the exploiting class and the exploited. Those who place imperialist and colonial countries on the same level, no matter what democratic phrases they might use to conceal this fact, are nothing but agents of imperialism.*”⁷⁴¹

Of course, Marxists must not lend any *political* support to Hamas or other forces as we stated in our declaration on the latest Gaza war. But this must not lead revolutionaries to deny support for the Palestinian resistance which today takes place under the leadership of Hamas.

“The RCIT condemns all those reformist forces (like most left-wing social democrats and ex-Stalinist parties) which criticize equally Israel and “terrorist organizations” like Hamas, which defend the right of existence for Israel (including centrists like the CWI) or which refuse to support the Palestinian resistance because it is led by petty-bourgeois Islamist forces like Hamas (including many other centrist groups based in the Western world like the IMT or the British AWL). Of course, revolutionary socialists don’t share an inch of the political goals of the petty-bourgeois leaderships of Hamas. However only a fool or a servant of imperialism can deny that this is a war between an oppressor state (Israel) and an oppressed people – the Palestinians! The Palestinians fight for their right to live and exist! Any left-wing organization which stands aside in this war, which refuses to support the struggle of the Palestinian resistance under its existing leadership against the Israeli aggression, under the pretext of secular democracy or socialism, betrays exactly such democratic and socialist principles!

*While we support the heroic struggle of the Palestinian fighters of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other resistance organizations, we warn against any illusion in the petty-bourgeois leaderships of these organizations. The working class in Palestine and internationally need their independent fighting party for socialism. Forward in building a revolutionary workers party as part of a Fifth International based on a revolutionary program! Long live international solidarity!”*⁷⁴²

The CWI commits a characteristic failure of centrism: they call for the solidarity

⁷⁴¹ Leon Trotsky: *Petty-Bourgeois Democrats and Moralizers* (1938-39); in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, Supplement 1934-40, p. 866

⁷⁴² *New Wave of Israeli terror against Gaza: Support the Palestinian Resistance! Defeat the Zionist killing machine! Statement of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)*, 15.11.2012, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/defend-gaza

with the victims but fail to support their concrete struggles for liberation. Trotsky's condemnation of the centrist politician Georg Ledebour, written in 1932, also hits well at the political failures of the CWI today:

"Nevertheless, Ledebour's position even on this question does not leave the precincts of centrism. Ledebour demands that a battle be waged against colonial oppression; he is ready to vote in parliament against colonial credits; he is ready to take upon himself a fearless defense of the victims of a crushed colonial insurrection. But Ledebour will not participate in preparing a colonial insurrection. Such work he considers putschism, adventurism, Bolshevism. And therein is the whole gist of the matter.

*What characterizes Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognizing their "right" to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilized executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism."*⁷⁴³

Socialist Zionism a la CWI

A particular form of adaption to social-imperialism is the CWI's (and its Israeli section's *Maavak Sozialisti*) support for the "socialist" two-state solution, i.e. the continuing existence of a separate "socialist" Jewish state Israel at the side of a "socialist" Palestinian state. Thus the last CWI World Congress in 2010 stated:

*"It is only through united mass movements of the working class and poor in Palestine, and in Israel, as well, that a solution will be found; opposing national oppression, the bosses' parties and imperialism; and bringing about real self-determination for Palestinians - for a socialist, democratic Palestine and a socialist Israel, as part of a equal and voluntary socialist confederation of the Middle East."*⁷⁴⁴

Surely, the CWI stresses that these two states must be socialist states. But this makes things even more muddled and nonsensical. How can you have a socialist solution without reversing the ethnic cleansing, without granting the 7.5 million Palestinian refugees the right to return to their home towns and villages?!⁷⁴⁵ As everyone knows this is among the deepest, most important

⁷⁴³ Leo Trotzki: Was nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats (1932); in: Schriften über Deutschland, pp. 246-247; in English: Leon Trotsky: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next02.htm>

⁷⁴⁴ CWI: The crisis of capitalism and the naked role of imperialism are graphically manifested in the Middle East. Document No. 3, CWI 10th World Congress, 28.12.2010 <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/4736>

⁷⁴⁵ On the number of Palestinian refugees see Yasser Shalabi: Palestinian Population, Movement and Statistics. Birzeit University Working Paper 2011/6, Position Papers Module (2011)

demands of the Palestinians and indeed of the whole Arab world. The CWI sometimes even acknowledges that the Arab working class supports the destruction of the Israeli Apartheid state. In the CWI book *"Marxism in today's World"*, its leader Peter Taaffe admits: *"We accept that many Arab workers have the hope that the Israeli state must be destroyed. It is an imperialist wedge against the Arab Revolution."* ⁷⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the CWI calls for a continuation of the Israeli state (on a "socialist basis") and therefore the continuation of the collective expulsion of the Palestinian people from their home territory. How does the CWI leadership justify such an awful ignorance of the wishes of the oppressed Palestinian people? By referring to the wishes of the Jewish-Israeli people, as the following quote shows:

"They will come to nothing as the Palestinian masses will not give up their demands for a separate state. Equally, the Israeli population will not accede to the demand that they form a possible minority in a 'common state'. To do so would mean that they would take the place of the oppressed Palestinians; this would be inevitable on a capitalist basis. Our demand for a socialist, democratic Palestine and a socialist Israel linked to a socialist confederation of the Middle East retains all its validity." ⁷⁴⁷

The same justification was expressed by Taaffe in another book where he polemicizes against supporters of a one-state solution:

"In effect, at the 2002 SSP conference, they accepted the Socialist Workers' Party's false slogan of 'a Palestinian state with minority rights for the Israelis'. Although at a subsequent conference this position was watered down, nevertheless, in the SSP newspapers and the public statements of leading SSP members, the idea of a Palestinian state with minority rights for Israelis still appears. Such an abstract slogan would never be accepted by the Israeli population, with the implication that their own separate state would be liquidated and they would be forcibly incorporated into another, 'Palestinian state'." ⁷⁴⁸

So we see that the CWI accepts the continuation of the collective expulsion of the Palestinian people because – so it guesses – the settler people do not wish to give up their privileges. It puts the wishes of the oppressed nation (the Palestinians) on an equal level with the wishes of the oppressor nation (the Israeli Jews). This transforms socialist internationalism as a strategy for national liberation into a reactionary strategy for justification of national oppression. Does anyone seriously believe that the Palestinian refugees would be liberated if you only put the word "socialist" before the impoverished Gaza and West Bank alongside the rich "socialist" Israel?!

⁷⁴⁶ Peter Taaffe: *Marxismus heute. Antworten auf Krieg, Kapitalismus und Umweltzerstörung* (2006), p. 40; We are quoting and translating from the German translation since we don't possess the English-language original of *„Marxism in today's World“*.

⁷⁴⁷ CWI: World Relations. Document No. 1, CWI 10th World Congress, 26.12.2010 <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/4735>

⁷⁴⁸ Peter Taaffe: A socialist World is possible - the history of the CWI, 31.08.2004 <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/4779>

In fact, the CWI's socialist Zionism is nothing but a capitulation to the aristocratic prejudices and material privileges of sectors of the Jewish population in Israel. It completely empties the revolutionary content of Lenin's strategy of national liberation. For him, as for all Marxists, the right of national self-determination was the revolutionary answer against national oppression and an integral part of the total strategy of socialist revolution.

*"That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. It is from this division that our definition of the "right of nations to self-determination" must follow, a definition that is consistently democratic, revolutionary, and in accord with the general task of the immediate struggle for socialism."*⁷⁴⁹

In the Marxist understanding the right of national self-determination is thus *the right of oppressed nations*. It cannot and does not imply the "right" of an oppressor nation to continue the national oppression. Lenin was absolutely unambiguous about this:

*"The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation. (...) It implies only a consistent expression of struggle against all national oppression."*⁷⁵⁰

We do not deny the difficulties of overcoming the reactionary prejudices of many Jewish Israeli workers since they are based on concrete aristocratic material privileges. However, the solution can hardly be to put the wishes to remove national oppression of the Palestinian majority population (in addition to the same wishes of hundreds of millions of Arabs) on the same level as the wishes of a small, extremely privileged settler people (the Israeli Jews). Neither do we put the wish of a man to rape a woman and the wish of the woman to avoid this on the same level. We don't look for a compromise between these two wishes. Neither do we look for a compromise between a settler people and an expelled people.

It is obvious that the CWI applies such a reactionary method on the national question where the interests of imperialism and of aristocratic privileges of oppressor nations are involved.

This is like the CWI's support for the British claim of Argentina's Malvinas islands because of "right of national self-determination" of 1,800 colonial settlers. In this context one should also mention the CWI's reactionary support "for self-determination" of the pro-British Protestant minority in Northern

⁷⁴⁹ V.I.Lenin: The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, in: LCW 21, p. 409

⁷⁵⁰ V.I.Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, in: LCW 22, p. 146

Ireland against the wishes for unification of Ireland by the whole Irish nation.

As we said, we do not deny the huge obstacles to break the majority of the Jewish Israeli workers from Zionism. In fact they will most likely do so only as the last in the region, as a result of successful national and social liberation struggles by the Arab, Berber and Kurdish working class and oppressed in the whole Middle East. Only if the Jewish Israeli workers break with their aristocratic prejudices – which many of them probably will when they are faced with the impending destruction of their Apartheid state by a wave of successful workers and peasants revolutions in the Arab world – only in this case can they be won to socialism. This should be obvious since one of the most important pillars of socialism is the liquidation of all forms of national oppression and the absolute equality between nations. Such a national equality is impossible without overcoming the terrible situation of the Palestinian people of which the absolute majority are refugees. This means the right to return to their homes. It is a grotesque illusion of the CWI to hope to win the Jewish Israeli workers for socialism without breaking them away from their reactionary settler mentality!

In fact, socialism is the only possibility for a real national liberation. Why? Because the unconditional right to return of the Palestinian people to what is today Israel necessitates the expropriation of the capitalist class (which today is of course mostly of Jewish-Israeli origin). Only if the enterprises are nationalized under workers control (the working class of course would be in its majority Palestinian workers), only if the land is nationalized and controlled by the working people (again, most of them would be Palestinians), only under such circumstances can a controlled and regulated transfer of wealth and resources to the Palestinian people take place. Only under such a socialist Palestine state can new homes be built for the returning population, jobs can be created and land can be given to the Palestinian peasants. Such a socialist Palestine would not expel the Jewish settlers. If they are prepared to accept the loss of their aristocratic privileges, if they are prepared to accept their status as a national minority with minority rights, if they are prepared to accept the Palestinian people as equals, then they can continue to live in Palestine.

For this reason, by the way, is the slogan of a single democratic state in Palestine a petty-bourgeois illusion. A “democratic” Palestine would be a bourgeois-democratic and therefore a capitalist Palestine. There would naturally be a continuation of massive inequality in favor of the already wealthy Israel Jews and to the disadvantage of the Palestinians. These are the lessons of South Africa after the fall of Apartheid in 1994.

Unfortunately, the CWI is incapable of supporting such a strategy of national liberation against Zionism as part of the struggle for the socialist revolution in the region. As a result of their adaption to social-imperialism they are incapable of supporting the Palestinian liberation struggle – as many other liberation struggles in the world – under its concrete form today. Thus they fail one of

the most important principles of Marxism. They are – as Trotsky said – “lackeys, apologists, agents of the imperialists, of the slaveholders”:

“Capitalist brigands always conduct a “defensive” war, even when Japan is marching against Shanghai and France against Syria or Morocco. The revolutionary proletariat distinguishes only between wars of oppression and wars of liberation. The character of a war is defined, not by diplomatic falsifications, but by the class which conducts the war and the objective aims it pursues in that war. The wars of the imperialist states, apart from the pretexts and political rhetoric, are of an oppressive character, reactionary and inimical to the people. Only the wars of the proletariat and of the oppressed nations can be characterized as wars of liberation (...)

The League of Nations is the citadel of imperialist pacifism. It represents a transitory historical combination of capitalist states in which the stronger command and buy out the weaker, then crawl on their bellies before America or try to resist; in which all equally are enemies of the Soviet Union, but are prepared to cover up each and every crime of the most powerful and rapacious among them. Only the politically blind, only those who are altogether helpless or who deliberately corrupt the conscience of the people, can consider the League of Nations, directly or indirectly, today or tomorrow, an instrument of peace. (...)

*Whoever directly or indirectly supports the system of colonization and protectorates, the domination of British capital in India, the domination of Japan in Korea or in Manchuria, of France in Indochina or in Africa, whoever does not fight against colonial enslavement, whoever does not support the uprisings of the oppressed nations and their independence, whoever defends or idealizes Gandhism, that is, the policy of passive resistance on questions which can be solved only by force of arms, is, despite good intentions or bad, a lackey, an apologist, an agent of the imperialists, of the slaveholders, of the militarists, and helps them to prepare new wars in pursuit of their old aims or new.”*⁷⁵¹

Is Revolutionary Defeatism too much for the Working Class? On the CWI' and IMT's Falsification of Lenin's and Trotsky's Method

Both the CWI as well as the IMT consistently try to falsify Lenin's and Trotsky's approach to the question of revolutionary defeatism. We have already shown on several issues that they refused to take the side of the oppressed people who are struggling against the imperialists and we will not repeat these arguments here. Here we want to deal with another argument of the CWI and IMT leaders. They claim that for Lenin and Trotsky revolutionary defeatism was only an idea for small circles of Marxists but not for the masses. Secondly, they claim that Trotsky's defense of “semi-fascist” Brazil against “democratic” Britain was

⁷⁵¹ Leon Trotsky: Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam (1932), in: Writings 1932, p. 153 (emphasis in original)

a “hypothetical example” with no relevance for today.

Let us first present the arguments of our centrist opponents: The CWI leaders write:

“Yet the ultra-left sects of today, determined to demonstrate their intransigent ‘Marxist’ approach, continue to advance slogans based on their misconception of ‘defeatism’. Even they – confused as they are – do not claim that they have the support of a majority of the working class. But how do they think they can win a majority to oppose the war aims of British capitalism, to force the Tories to abandon their military adventure? Apparently, they believe it can be done by support for the Junta, when most workers have an instinctive hatred for what they see as a ‘fascist’ regime, and an understandable desire to see it defeated. The Tories, of course, are cynically exploiting the workers’ anti-fascist feelings; but support for the Junta would put Marxists beyond the pale in the eyes of workers, leaving the Tories free hypocritically to capitalise on the ‘fight against fascism’.

The pseudo-Marxists also believe, it seems, that support for a socialist opposition to the war can be won through a policy which abandons the Falkland Islanders to the tender mercies of the Junta, writing off their rights in favour of the Junta’s legalistic claim to the land under their feet.

The most monstrous absurdity of the sects’ position, however, is the idea that workers can be won to a socialist position on the basis of calling for the defeat of the Task Force, calling literally – as representatives of the sects have stated in public – for “the sinking of the fleet”! They are in favour of the slaughter of workers in the ranks of the navy and army, and on this basis they will win mass support from the working class! This is a travesty of Marxism which, in so far as it has any effect at all, can only play into the hands of the Tories and Labour’s right, allowing them to portray ‘Marxists’ as idiots who support the Argentinean junta.”⁷⁵²

IMT leader Alan Woods presents a very similar line of argument:

“The difference between abstract politics and the dialectical method is shown by the evolution of Lenin’s position on revolutionary tactics in the period 1914 to 1917. In August 1914, the split in the 2nd International created an entirely new situation. In the light of the unprecedented betrayal of the Social Democracy, it was necessary to regroup and re-educate the small and isolated forces of Marxism internationally. Lenin in this period laid heavy emphasis on the basic principles of revolutionary internationalism, above all the impossibility of returning to the old International, and implacable opposition to all forms of patriotism (revolutionary defeatism). In order to combat the doubts and vacillations of the Bolshevik leaders, Lenin gave the sharpest possible expression to these ideas, such as “turn the imperialist war into civil war,” and “the defeat of one’s own bourgeoisie is the lesser evil.” It is arguable that, on occasion, he exaggerated. It would not be the first time that, in order to “straighten the stick,” Lenin bent it too far in the other direction. On the fundamental issues, there is no doubt whatever that Lenin was right. But unless we understand his method, not just what he wrote but why he wrote

⁷⁵² Socialist Party (CWI): Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement? In: Socialism Today, No 108, April 2007, <http://www.socialismtoday.org/108/falklands.html>

it, we can end in a complete mess.

Ultra-left and sectarian groups always repeat Lenin's words without understanding a single line. They take his writings on war as something absolute, outside of time and space. They do not understand that, at this time, Lenin was not writing for the masses, but for a tiny handful of cadres in a given historical context. Unless we understand this, we can make a fundamental mistake. In order to combat chauvinism, and stress the impossibility of any reconciliation with the Social Democracy, and particularly its left wing (Kautsky and the "centre"), Lenin used some formulations which were undoubtedly exaggerated. Such exaggerations, for example, led him to characterise Trotsky's position as "centrism" which was entirely incorrect. Endless confusions have arisen from the one sided interpretation of Lenin's position of this period.

When Lenin returned to Russia after March 1917, he fundamentally modified his position. Not that his opposition to the imperialist war was any less, or his opposition to social chauvinism any less implacable. He continued to be vigilant with regard to any backsliding on the part of the Bolshevik leaders on the question of the war. But here it was no longer a question of theory, but of the living movement of the masses. Lenin's position after March 1917 bore little resemblance to the slogans he had advanced earlier. He saw that, in the concrete circumstances, the mass of the workers and peasants had illusions in "the defence of the Revolution," as they understood it. It was absolutely necessary to take this into account, if the Bolsheviks were to connect to the real mood of the masses. If Lenin had maintained the old position, it would have been merely doctrinaire. It would have entirely cut the Bolsheviks off from the real movement of the workers and peasants. Only hopeless sectarians and doctrinaires could fail to see the difference.

In a speech to the delegates of the Bolshevik faction of the Soviets, Lenin explained:

"The masses approach this question not from the theoretical but from a practical point of viewpoint. Our mistake lies in our theoretical approach. The class conscious proletariat may consent to a revolutionary war that actually overthrows revolutionary defencism. Before the representatives of the soldiers the matter must be put in a practical way, otherwise nothing will come of it. We are not at all pacifists. The fundamental question is: Which class is waging the war? The capitalist class, tied to the banks cannot wage any but an imperialist war. The working class can. (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 20, p. 96.).

As a matter of fact, the slogans of "revolutionary defeatism" played no role in preparing the masses for the October revolution."⁷⁵³

Hardly any sentence of these centrist social-pacifists makes sense. These bigmouths, who laugh about the "ultra-left sects", neither understand Lenin's and Trotsky's position nor historical facts. They say that the majority of the working class does not understand and does not support a revolutionary defeatist position. The workers "would not have abandoned the Falklanders". One could never win the workers by calling for the defeat of "their army" and

⁷⁵³ Alan Woods: Marxism and the State, International Marxist Tendency, December 2008, <http://www.marxist.com/marxism-and-the-state-part-one.htm>

“their country”. And, Lenin himself is said to have dropped defeatism in 1917.

It is certainly true that at the beginning of the World War I and even for a longer period during the war, the majority of the working class might not have been won for a revolutionary defeatist position. One could equally say that at the beginning of a revolutionary situation and maybe even during the whole phase, the majority of the working class might not be won for a revolutionary socialist program. The fearful centrists draw from this real possibility the conclusion that they should not openly argue for a revolutionary defeatist position or a revolutionary socialist program. The Marxists know that if their organization is in a minority they must even more energetically and patiently explain their revolutionary policy. Instead of dropping the central ideas of the program they must be resolutely defended, propagated and explained. The whole argument, that “the workers don’t understand a defeatist position”, just indicates that the task of Marxists to convince the workers of their interests is still not accomplished. But the centrists a la CWI and IMT are what Lenin called in *What Has To Be Done* as “*chvostists*”, i.e. tailists. They adapt to the reformist labor bureaucracy and excuse this by referring to the temporary, often backward, political consciousness of the working class today. Instead of this, the task of Marxists is to serve the interests of its liberation struggle and to argue for the necessary tasks to accomplish this.

The fact that the majority of the working class supports the defence of its imperialist fatherland at the beginning of a major war, is no historic exception. It is rather the rule, as Lenin and Trotsky explained repeatedly. When he summarized the experience of the Bolsheviks during the World War I, Lenin wrote in 1922 about the policy towards the workers movement concerning a coming war: “*We must take special pains to explain that the question of “defence of the fatherland” will inevitably arise, and that the overwhelming majority of the working people will inevitably decide it in favour of their bourgeoisie.*”⁷⁵⁴

Trotsky also emphasized this idea in his *Transitional Program* in 1938: “*At the beginning of the war the sections of the Fourth International will inevitably feel themselves isolated: every war takes the national masses unawares and impels them to the side of the government apparatus. The internationalists will have to swim against the stream.*”⁷⁵⁵

But what did Lenin and Trotsky conclude from this? That one should not call for the defeat of one’s own imperialist fatherland? Hardly! Lenin rather stressed – continuing his reasoning in the quote just mentioned:

“*Therefore, first, it is necessary to explain what “defence of the fatherland” means. Second, in connection with this, it is necessary to explain what “defeatism” means. Lastly, we must explain that the only possible method of combating war is to preserve existing, and to form new, illegal organisations in which all revolutionaries taking*

⁷⁵⁴ V.I. Lenin: Notes on the Tasks of our Delegation at The Hague (1922); in: LCW 33, p. 447

⁷⁵⁵ Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program (1938); in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 200

*part in a war carry on prolonged anti-war activities—all this must be brought into the forefront.”*⁷⁵⁶

Likewise, Trotsky did not conclude from the difficulties of the revolutionaries in swimming against the stream to drop revolutionary defeatist positions, but he rather confirmed these principles in the program of the Fourth International:

*“The fundamental content of the politics of the international proletariat will consequently be a struggle against imperialism and its war. In this struggle the basic principle is: “the chief enemy is in your own country” or “the defeat of your own (imperialist) government is the lesser evil.” (...) It will be the duty of the international proletariat to aid the oppressed countries in their war against oppressors. The same duty applies in regard to aiding the USSR, or whatever other workers’ government might arise before the war or during the war. The defeat of every imperialist government in the struggle with the workers’ state or with a colonial country is the lesser evil.”*⁷⁵⁷

Furthermore, if the majority of the working class still rallies to the defence of its imperialist fatherland, the task of Marxists is first to win and consolidate the vanguard of the class for a revolutionary defeatist position. The Bolsheviks certainly focused in 1914-16 to win over the vanguard to a consistent revolutionary defeatist position while at the same time they tried to influence as much as possible the mass of the workers in such a direction. Only after they achieved the revolutionary consolidation of the vanguard, could they start to conquer the masses.⁷⁵⁸ But the CWI and the IMT never even tried to win the vanguard for revolutionary defeatism. They excuse themselves by referring to the problem that “the workers don’t understand this”. As if the CWI and the IMT would be confronted with the task of winning the majority of the working class! They never were nearly as strong as the Bolsheviks were even in their weakest phase! Before they cudgel their brain about the challenge to win the majority of the working class, they should try to win a few thousand vanguard workers for revolutionary defeatism in a war! They did not and they could not. Why? Because they themselves, the leaders and probably many amongst their membership who were trained for years in opportunism, did not share a Marxist position on the imperialist war! This is the truth that the CWI and IMT leaders try to hide behind their phrases on what the workers understand and don’t understand!

Therefore when the CWI and IMT leaders say that Lenin formulated politics only for “small circle of Marxists” we reply: “leaving aside that this is not true (as we will show below), even if he did only this, he did more than you because you don’t even win your own “small circle of Marxists” for revolutionary defeatism!”

⁷⁵⁶ V.I. Lenin: Notes on the Tasks of our Delegation at The Hague (1922); in: LCW 33, p. 448

⁷⁵⁷ Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, p. 200 (emphasize in the original)

⁷⁵⁸ See on this Lenin’s remarks at a meeting after the III. Congress of the Comintern in 1921: Reden auf der Beratung der Mitglieder der deutschen, polnischen, tschechoslowakischen, ungarischen und italienischen Delegation, in: LW Ergänzungsband 1917-23, p. 333

But, as we said, even their presentation of Lenin's policy during the World War I is a historic falsification. The Bolsheviks raised the slogans of defeatism not only in letters and theoretical contribution but in their public declarations which were distributed illegally in the factories. In their first public Manifesto *The War and Russian Social-Democracy* written in September 1914, their Central Committee declared to the working class:

"But to us Russian Social-Democrats there cannot be the slightest doubt that, from the standpoint of the working class and of the toiling masses of all the nations of Russia, the defeat of the tsarist monarchy, the most reactionary and barbarous of governments, which is oppressing the largest number of nations and the greatest mass of the population of Europe and Asia, would be the lesser evil." They concluded: *"The conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan."*⁷⁵⁹

Let us remind how the CWI/IMT justified its failure to call for immediate withdrawal of the British Navy and an end of the war during the Malvinas adventure of the Tory government. They argued: *"To force the withdrawal of the Task Force would have involved the organization of a general strike, which itself would have posed the question of the coming to power of a socialist government. Yet at the outset of the war, such a demand would have received no support from the British workers. (...) Nor would the call to stop the war or to withdraw the fleet have provided a basis even for a mass campaign of demonstrations, meetings and agitation."*⁷⁶⁰

The Bolsheviks acted very differently. Alexander Shlyapnikov, one of its leaders during the war period, reported in his recollection of the Bolsheviks work during World War I about the party's anti-war agitation on the streets and in the factories. He quotes from a leaflet, issued by the Petersburg Committee of the party at the beginning of the war:

*"Down with the war!" "War on war!" must roll powerfully across city and hamlet alike across the width of our Russia. Workers must remember that they do not have enemies over the frontier: everywhere the working class is oppressed by the rich and the power of the property-owners. Everywhere it is oppressed by the yoke of exploitation and the chains of poverty. (...) Without having time to wash workers' blood off the streets of Petersburg and only yesterday branding all of working-class Petersburg as well as all the workers of Russia as "enemies within" against whom savage cossacks and mercenary police went into action, they now call for the defence of the fatherland. Soldiers and workers! You are being called on to die for the glory of the cossack lash and for the glory of a fatherland that shoots starving peasants and workers and strangles its best sons in prison. No, we don't want the war, you must declare. We want the freedom of Russia. (...) Down with the war, down with the tsarist government! Long live the revolution!"*⁷⁶¹

In another leaflet, in autumn 1914, they called the workers to organize

⁷⁵⁹ V.I. Lenin: *The War and Russian Social-Democracy* (1914); in: LCW 21, pp. 32-34

⁷⁶⁰ Peter Taaffe: *The Rise of Militant*, London 1995, Chapter 20 "The Falklands/Malvinas War", <http://socialistalternative.org/literature/militant/>

⁷⁶¹ Alexander Shlyapnikov: *On the Eve of 1917* (1923), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/shliapnikov/1923/eve1917/index.html>

themselves and get arms for the coming struggle.⁷⁶²

Contrary to the historic falsifications of the CWI and IMT centrists, Lenin emphasized the need to explain the revolutionary defeatist positions not only to the vanguard but also to the masses. This was one of the reasons why he considered the work of the Bolsheviks deputies in the Duma and their role in the trial against them after their arrest as important. He even criticized them for not defending the revolutionary defeatist position strongly enough. Nevertheless, he praised the outcome of the trial for spreading the revolutionary words about “turning the guns against the imperialist government” to the masses:

*“The facts show that, in the very first months after the outbreak of the war, the class-conscious vanguard of the workers of Russia rallied, in deeds, about the Central Committee and the Central Organ. However unpleasant this fact may be to certain “groups”, it is undeniable. Thanks to the trial, the words cited in the indictment: “The guns should be directed, not against our brothers, the wage slaves of other countries, but against the reactionary and bourgeois governments and parties of all countries” — these words will spread — and have already done so — all over Russia as a call for proletarian internationalism, for the proletarian revolution. Thanks to the trial, the class slogan of the vanguard of the workers of Russia has reached the masses.”*⁷⁶³

Alan Woods claims that Lenin “fundamentally modified his position” in 1917 and that “the question of the war ... was no longer a question of theory, but of the living movement of the masses.” In fact the question of the war was, already before 1917, not only a question of theory but also of the “living movement of the masses”. But the masses themselves had changed. While they were relatively backward and passive in 1914-17, they staged a revolutionary uprising in February 1917 and overthrew the Tsarist regime. Out of this emerged a new government which was heavily reliant on the revolutionary masses and in which these masses had massive illusions at the beginning. The masses became – as Lenin termed it – “honest fatherland defender” because they wanted to defend their revolution. This is why the Bolsheviks concretized the slogans to the new situation without however dropping revolutionary defeatism as the centrists suggest.

None of these specifics of the Russian Revolution in 1917 is relevant to the situation in Britain during the Malvinas War in 1982 or any other war since then. Neither was there a revolutionary situation, nor did the masses want to defend a revolution, nor did the CWI or the IMT have any influence amongst the masses like the Bolsheviks had. In addition, Britain was not involved in an inner-imperialist war where revolutionaries stood – like the Bolsheviks during the World War I – for the defeat of both sides but rather in imperialist wars against semi-colonial countries. In such wars – as the Fourth International stated in its *Transitional Program* – “the duty of the international proletariat is to aid

⁷⁶² See the historic notes in W.I.Lenin: *Sämtliche Werke* Band XVIII, Wien-Berlin 1929, S. 493. This leaflet is also mentioned in Shlyapnikov's recollection.

⁷⁶³ V.I. Lenin: What has been revealed by the Trial of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Duma Group (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 176

the oppressed countries in their war against oppressors."

However, instead of understanding the Fourth International's method, the centrists continue their attempt to falsify Trotsky's position on imperialist wars in the colonial world. This is how they relativize Trotsky's principle of the defense of semi-colonial countries against imperialism:

"Not content with distorting Lenin, the sects also drag Trotsky in to support their ludicrous position. Did not Trotsky say just before the Second World War – the sects argue – that, in the event of war between Britain and Brazil, "in this case I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain". Trotsky made this remark in 1938 in an interview with Mateo Fossa, the leader of Trotsky's supporters in (as it happens) Argentina. (The interview is published in Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39, pp31-36)

Again, the pseudo-Marxists have taken Trotsky's remarks completely out of context, without analysing the situation or Trotsky's reasoning. He was obviously dealing with a hypothetical case. But he formulated his position sharply in this way in order to counter the idea, then being peddled by the Stalinist leadership of the Comintern and the world's 'Communist' Parties, that the struggle of 'democracy' against 'fascism' should take priority over a revolutionary struggle against imperialism. In the interests of the Russian bureaucracy's diplomatic deals with the ruling classes of the capitalist democracies, the revolutionary struggle internationally was postponed indefinitely.

Trotsky explained that in the coming world war – which he clearly predicted from the middle of the 1930s – the capitalist class, if faced with an aggravated crisis and mounting opposition to their rule, could easily throw off its democratic mask and resort to totalitarian, fascist forms of rule. On the other hand, in colonial or semi-colonial countries, the war could stimulate revolutionary movements of the workers and exploited peasantry which could topple fascist regimes.

*In the case of war between Britain and Brazil, "If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro, and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil, on the contrary, should be victorious, it would give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat". (p34) Even in this hypothetical case, Trotsky clearly analysed the probable processes and the alternative perspectives which would be opened up. Yet faced with a real war in the South Atlantic at the present time, the pseudo-Marxist sects are incapable of analysing the actual class interests or processes involved."*⁷⁶⁴

The CWI says that "Trotsky's remarks deal with a hypothetical case." This is true. He said it himself. But what do they want to suggest? Do they mean that in concrete, real wars Trotsky was not prepared to defend semi-colonial countries, which had a reactionary regime at its top, against imperialism?! But Trotsky also defended China under the reactionary Chiang Kai-shek against Japan and

⁷⁶⁴ Socialist Party (CWI): Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement? In: Socialism Today, No 108, April 2007, <http://www.socialismtoday.org/108/falklands.html>

Ethiopia under King Haile Selassie against Italy!

They suggest that Trotsky's position was influenced by the possibility that *"the capitalist class, if faced with an aggravated crisis and mounting opposition to their rule, could easily throw off its democratic mask and resort to totalitarian, fascist forms of rule."* Do the CWI leaders seriously want to suggest that if they could not easily throw off its democratic mask and resort to fascism, Trotsky would have rather not defend Brazil?! What an absurd suggestion! As we have shown above Lenin, Trotsky and the Communist International also supported anti-colonial rebellions under Islamist and dictatorial leaderships against "democratic" imperialist France and Britain! And in opposition to the CWI suggestions, this principled anti-imperialist position was also in no way related to the possibility of another world war in the near future.

The CWI writes that *"in colonial or semi-colonial countries, the war could stimulate revolutionary movements of the workers and exploited peasantry which could topple fascist regimes."* Yes, indeed this is what happened in Argentina in 1983 after the Malvinas War. Again, this is hardly an argument that Trotsky's anti-imperialist method is not applicable today!

So we see that the CWI's and the IMT's interpretation of the classic Marxist position on revolutionary defeatism is based on a thorough falsification. It is however not an accidental falsification. The whole tradition of Ted Grant, which shaped both the CWI of Peter Taffee and the Alan Woods IMT, is marked by the systematic adaption to the ideological prejudices of the reformist bureaucracy. Hence the CWI/IMT nonsense of the peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism, the strange idea of the possibility of such a transformation via a "socialist majority" in the bourgeois parliament, the characterisation of police men and women as "workers in uniform" and so on.⁷⁶⁵ This extreme right-wing opportunism also naturally finds its expression in the issue of imperialist wars which is one of the sharpest forms of class contradictions.

CMR/IRMT: Rejection of Anti-Imperialism in ultra-left Clothes

The British-based *Committee for Marxist Revival* (CMR), and its main component, the exiled *Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency* (IMRT), follows a tactic in conflicts between imperialism and semi-colonies which *sounds* more left-wing than those of the CWI/IMT but in its practical conclusions comes to the same result. It is no coincidence, that the CMR was part of Alan Wood's IMT for years.

As we showed in chapter 9, the CMR/IRMT claims that Lenin's and Trotsky's division of the world into imperialist and (semi-)colonial, oppressor and

⁷⁶⁵ See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward*, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 1, pp. 30-31 (September 2011), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/sp-and-committee-for-a-workers-international>

oppressed countries is no longer accurate today. They conclude from this – as they emphasized in a polemic against the RCIT in early 2012:

*“Therefore, when a country is threatened in some way, the international left should not look to defend the national sovereignty or territorial integrity of these countries.”*⁷⁶⁶

This meant that in the wars of the last two decades the IRMT refused to defend the countries under attack by imperialism:

*“In 1990-91 we did not side with the Baathist regime against US imperialism. We backed the Iraqi masses against both imperialism and its local stooge.”*⁷⁶⁷

Similarly, the IRMT claims that it was wrong to defend Iraq in 2003 against the US attack or to defend Iran against a possible future attack by the USA and/ or Israel.

“In places like Iraq or Iran, therefore, the working class should lead the masses in forming an independent third camp – neither with its ‘own’ bourgeoisie in defence of a ‘national interest’, nor with imperialism. This is a united front of the workers and all exploited and oppressed layers in society. It should not only be anti-imperialist but also fight for the overthrow of capitalism through posing transitional demands like workers’ control.

*It would call on all international leftwing or progressive organisations to lend it support to make this independent and truly revolutionary front a real alternative to the other two camps. Instead of calling for workers to join the army of the reactionary stooge bourgeoisie the Marxists should call on workers who are drafted into the army to shoot their officers, to form soldiers’ councils, to arm the masses with heavy weaponry to defend their factories and neighbourhoods, to train the masses in military skills to a high level and to conduct a revolutionary war against imperialism and the local bourgeoisie.”*⁷⁶⁸

As we see, this is a very similar practical conclusion as the mainstream centrists in the West arrive at. However, the way that the tactic is formulated, is ultra-left. The anti-imperialist position of the Bolshevik-Communists – *“Defend the semi-colonies and turn the guns of the soldiers in the imperialist armies against their domestic enemies”* – is not enough for the IRMT. *“We want to shoot the officers of the semi-colonial army too and wage a revolutionary war both against imperialism and the local bourgeoisie”* say the ultra-lefts. Why? Because they claim that it doesn’t matter if the South is totally dominated by the imperialist monopolies or if the grip of the imperialist monopolies is weakened while the semi-colonial bourgeoisie still rules. Capitalism is always bad, so as long as we don’t have socialism, we don’t care about the concrete conditions by which the working

⁷⁶⁶ Maziar Razi and Morad Shirin (IRMT): Modern imperialist domination and Islamic fundamentalism; <http://marxist.cloudaccess.net/impire/115-modern-imperialist-domination-and-islamic-fundamentalism.html#>. (my emphasis)

⁷⁶⁷ Maziar Razi and Morad Shirin (IRMT): Where should we stand if US-Israel attack Iran? 25 January 2012, in: Marxist Revival No. 12, December 2011/January 2012, p. 2, <http://marxist.cloudaccess.net/mideast/233-where-should-we-stand-if-us-israel-attack-iran.html>

⁷⁶⁸ Maziar Razi and Morad Shirin (IRMT): Where should we stand if US-Israel attack Iran?, p. 2

class and the popular masses are oppressed and exploited. This is the logic of the CMR/IRMT.

As we quoted above, the comrades say *"one should not defend the national sovereignty or territorial integrity of these countries"*. Why? Because such countries are ruled by a bourgeois, reactionary ruling class. With the same logic one could say that when there is a popular rebellion under, let us say, an Islamist leadership, or if there is a national liberation struggle under, let us say, a Kurdish big land owner leadership, Marxists should not support them because these are reactionary leaderships. Instead they should fight against both at the same time. It should not go unnoted that the British members of the CMR (who are coming from the IMT) have a long history of deep entrisism into the Labour Party. They vehemently defended their completely rotten and bourgeoisified leadership against all attacks from the Tories. They campaigned to bring this Labour leadership into the government of the British imperialist state, a government – let us remind our comrades – which waged massive austerity packages against the working class and which launched the attacks on Serbia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 and which supported Israel's war in Lebanon in 2006. While they have not slightest problem with such a tactic, they could never defend a semi-colonial country against an imperialist onslaught because ... it has a reactionary leadership! Could this inconsistent policy – to put it politely – be connected with the fact that this group is located in Britain?

As we have shown, Lenin and Trotsky defended semi-colonial countries which had a reactionary (even "semi-fascist") government against imperialist attacks. We are pretty sure that the main leaders of the CMR/IMRT are well aware of the classic position of Leon Trotsky. They are living in Britain in exile for more than two decades and have been part of the leadership of two international "Trotskyist" organisations (the Mandeliste Fourth International and Alan Woods IMT) and therefore surely have access to Trotsky's Writings. But despite this fact they choose to completely ignore Trotsky's position on the national liberation struggle of semi-colonial China in the 1930s and the position he took towards the struggle which took place under the leadership of Chiang-Kai-shek. When we criticized the comrades for their failure in anti-imperialism, they introduce in their reply an – again we say it politely – extraordinary argument in defence:

"For revolutionary Marxists the word 'Iran' is therefore meaningless unless it is made specific and concrete in terms of time and class. Trotsky's defence of Brazil or Ethiopia was a defence of the bourgeois state of these countries against imperialist aggression – at a time when such a state was a new development. But when today's 'Trotskyist' organisations use the arguments of Lenin and Trotsky from over a hundred years ago or even in 1930s that relate to the 'national bourgeoisie', they are (rightly) embarrassed to say that they defend the thoroughly reactionary Iranian state against an imperialist attack. So they only use the word 'Iran' to minimise their embarrassment! This surely

is an 'opportunistic' approach towards such an important issue." ⁷⁶⁹

We see that not only the Marxist program but also knowledge of history have a sad destiny on the pages of the CMR/IMRT publications. Let us remind the comrades, that neither for Brazil or Ethiopia having a bourgeois state "*was a new development*". Ethiopia was always an independent state which could defend itself against the appetites of the colonial empires until 1936 – also due to the fact that it routed the advancing Italian imperialists in the battle of Adwa on 1st March 1896 under the leadership of the Emperor Menelik II (we can be sure he was reactionary too). Brazil became independent from Portugal in 1821-24 and around the same time the people in the whole continent of Latin America expelled the Spanish occupation, i.e. more than 110 years before Trotsky expressed his position of support for Brazil (as well as for Mexico) against British imperialism. So much for the "*new development*" which the CMR/IMRT comrades invent in defence of a hopeless defenceless position.

But of course the main failure of the CMR/IMRT comrades is not their lack of historic knowledge but their lack of a Marxist method. They claim that such conflicts between imperialism and semi-colonies are about an "abstract question of territorial integrity". This is totally wrong. The question of national independence is always related to the class question. *Such conflicts therefore are about the relation of forces between the classes.*

* *It is about the relation of forces between the imperialist monopoly capital and the semi-colonial bourgeoisie.* The more the imperialist bourgeoisie succeeds in subordinating the semi-colonial bourgeoisie, the better will be its position to super-exploit the South, to deform the semi-colonies domestic markets and to squeeze out super-profits. The more the people of the semi-colonial world succeed in weakening the imperialist's grip – even if they cannot already overthrow capitalism as such – the better their conditions for future struggle for the socialist liberation will become.

* *It is about the relation of forces between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the working class in the imperialist countries.* Defeats of the imperialist bourgeoisie against semi-colonial countries weaken the monopolies. If the imperialists loose in a conflict with semi-colonial countries, they have less material resources to bribe the labor aristocracy or to integrate the middle class in order to use them against the working class. In addition they are politically and ideologically humiliated in the eyes of the masses – not only around the world but also in the metropolises itself.

* *It is about the relation of forces between the semi-colonial bourgeoisie and the working class in the semi-colonial countries.* Is it not obvious that the strengthening of the imperialist super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world in the neo-liberal globalization era not only weakened the position of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie against the imperialist monopolies, but also worsened the situation of the working class in the South?! As we have shown above, this was indeed

⁷⁶⁹ Maziar Razi and Morad Shirin (IRMT): Where should we stand if US-Israel attack Iran?, p. 3

the case.

As we already noted above, the CMR/IRMT follows a version of *"imperialist economism"*. They say *"the international left should not look to defend the national sovereignty or territorial integrity of these countries"* and then justify this by referencing Lenin's and Trotsky's opposite positions that in the 1920s and 1930s *"such a (semi-colonial, MP) state was a new development"*. As we know Lenin sharply criticised the ultra-left Bolsheviks Pyatakov, Bosch and Bukharin when they argued that the defence of oppressed nations was useless and wrong in the then new epoch of imperialism. However, to the defence of the Bolshevik ultra-lefts one could say that in 1914-1918 this question was new as was the epoch as such. The CMR/IRMT comrades however don't have any such excuse. We have been in the imperialist epoch now for more than 100 years and we have accumulated a lot of experience with imperialist bullying and wars. While the comrades don't formally adopt Pyatakov's et al position, they claim that such an imperialist economism is justified in the period since World War II when the colonial countries became semi-colonies. We can therefore call the CMR/IRMT's method as *"imperialist economism 2.0"*.

Both versions of *imperialist economism* have in common the fact that they ignore the extraordinary contradictory and many-faceted nature of the imperialist epoch. While these centrists see this epoch as one of smoothing of the contradictions, a simplification to the contradiction between capitalists and workers only, we rather follow Lenin's understanding. We see the imperialist epoch as a period where the class contradictions rather sharpen, become more explosive, where different forms of already existing contradictions coalesce and new contradictions emerge. Only such can the imperialist epoch be understood in a materialist-dialectical way as an *"entire totality of the manifold relations of this thing to others."*⁷⁷⁰

Therefore, Lenin stressed in his polemics against the imperialist economists that with the development of capitalism the national question and its explosive nature increases too:

*"The greater part of the dependent nations in Europe are capitalistically more developed than the colonies (...). But it is just this that generates greater resistance to national oppression and annexations!"*⁷⁷¹

Furthermore, Lenin was right when he wrote, that *"Imperialism is the epoch of the constantly increasing oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of "Great" Powers; it is therefore impossible to fight for the socialist international revolution against imperialism unless the right of nations to self-determination is recognised. "No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations" (Marx and Engels). A proletariat that tolerates the slightest coercion of other nations by its "own" nation cannot be a socialist proletariat."*⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ V.I.Lenin: Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic (1914); in: Collected Works Vol. 38, p. 220

⁷⁷¹ V. I. Lenin: The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 338

⁷⁷² V.I. Lenin/G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 313

Deluded by their imperialist economism, the CMR/IMRT comrades unfortunately completely fail to understand this. They therefore find themselves in the most embarrassing alliances with the British group *Alliance for Workers' Liberty* (AWL). The AWL is a particularly right-wing form of centrism which supports the existence of Israel. Not only could they never come to support the colonial people who are oppressed by "their" British imperialism: neither the Irish, nor in the Malvinas war nor in any Middle East War. Worse, their historic leader, Sean Matgamna, even wrote in their paper that one could hardly criticise the arch-reactionary Zionist Apartheid state Israel if it would attack Iran! Such Matgamna wrote in 2008:

"We do not advocate an Israeli attack on Iran, nor will we endorse it or take political responsibility for it. But if the Israeli airforce attempts to stop Iran developing the capacity to wipe it out with a nuclear bomb, in the name of what alternative would we condemn Israel?" ⁷⁷³

Which role can an organization play in the class struggle whose leaders implicitly side with the most reactionary watchdog of imperialism against a semi-colonial country which is strangled by the Western Great Powers?! But the CMR/IMRT comrades are so blinded by their ultra-left ignorance that they end up in bed with the Zionist right-wing centrist AWL. A sad but not accidental development.

⁷⁷³ Sean Matgamna: What if Israel bombs Iran? in: *Solidarity & Workers' Liberty*, Vol. 3, No. 136, 24.7.2008, p. 6