

Argentina: Falklands fever and anti-imperialism

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First of all, a premise. The Malvinas (called the Falkland Islands by the British) are Argentine because they were occupied by force, populated by foreign settlers and maintained under British occupation from the beginning of the 19th century, in 1833. Since then, Argentine governments have regularly denounced this theft. However, the demand for the return of the Malvinas has only been at the forefront of national politics in two periods: in 1982 at the beginning of the death agony of the military dictatorship, when it was being unsettled by strikes, demonstrations and mass movements, and now, under the second presidential term of Cristina Fernandez Kirchner. In fact, she said and did nothing important about this subject during her first term, or when she was a Senator under the presidency of Menem. All the dictatorships from 1955 to 1976, like the governments of Perón and Peronism showed no concern with the Malvinas.

The military dictatorship had felt it necessary to use the case of the Falklands as a diversion to strengthen its declining power and prestige and embarked on an adventure, believing that it would not cause a war. I am afraid that if the current Argentine Government raises the legitimate claim for the return of the islands colonized by the United Kingdom, this is not because it has a sudden anti-imperialist itch, but because it does not want to talk about wage increases, the predatory nature of mining and soybean exploitation, the problems of the railways and of energy as well as the anti-terrorism act imposed at the request of Obama. In addition, I also think that on June 14, when the President attended the UN Commission on Decolonization, she reaffirmed the just demand for the return of the Islands and the denunciation of British colonialism, but she did not pursue at the same time the end of the colonization of Puerto Rico, occupied by the United States since 1898, or the end of the colonization of territories usurped by Israel from the Palestinians.

All this rhetoric and this exploitation of a subject, which all Latin Americans know by heart, has no other purpose than to hide a conservative policy. The worst part is that progressive sectors are participating in this scam, losing their heads to the sound of the fanfare of nationalism.

The nationalist “socialist” Jorge Abelardo Ramos, both mentioned and recommended by the President, was, let us recall, the last civilian who visited the Falkland Islands when the dictatorship’s adventure had already demonstrated its bankruptcy. Remember that a plane had been chartered by the exiled Montoneros, to fight under the command of a dictator who had killed tens of thousands of activists of all kinds and oppressed the people of Argentina. Also, note that the vast majority of the Argentine left, starting with several self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups, but also socialists and communists, had supported the military adventures of the dictatorship. The “theory” of this aberrant position was that Britain was an imperialist country while Argentina was regarded as a semi-colony, a dependent country.

There were then only a few of us in the country and a handful in exile opposed to the war. In my case, I immediately published in the Mexican “Uno más uno” newspaper an article explaining that the main enemy was the dictatorship, the Malvinas Islands were Argentine, but the dead and the missing were also, that a victory would strengthen the dictatorship of Galtieri and of other killers, that the war would impede the process of ongoing British disarmament (in effect it was halted) and

strengthen the most colonialist sector, starting with the strengthening of Thatcher (immediately after the war she isolated and crushed the striking miners), and that nationalism fomented competing nationalisms. Alberto Di Franco, Adolfo Gilly and the great socialist and historian Sergio Bagú took the same position, which caused much controversy among Argentine exiles and the Mexican left.

What was the attitude of the global left? To support resistance to colonization or the rebellion against colonialism of oppressed peoples, as in the case of the North African tribal rebellion of Abdel-Kader against French and Spanish colonialism in the 1920s or the wars of liberation in Algeria or in Indochina in the 1950s and 1960s. Even Trotsky formulated the hypothesis that, facing a possible attack from “democratic” England against Brazil, ruled in the 1930s by the Vargas dictatorship, one should defend the semi-colonial country against the “democratic” imperialist aggressor.

But the Malvinas war was triggered by the Argentine dictatorship and not by England and was a diversionary manoeuvre by a government which was collaborating with the CIA, sending to torturers in Central America and whose international policy was anti-Communist, anti-Cuban and pro-imperialist, which was the savage oppressor of the workers and the people in the name of its alliance with the oligarchy and the multinationals. When, with many exiles (for example Juan Gelman), we sabotaged the soccer World Cup that the dictatorship used to acquire legitimacy and popular support, we had recourse to the same defeatism: the best thing for Argentine workers would be the defeat of the adventure, because it would shorten the survival of the dictatorship (as in fact happened) and because the war inoculated nationalism in Argentina and Britain instead of developing internationalist, pacifist, socialist ideas.

It is not surprising that there are people who have maintained a position of principle, based on the distinction between the exploited classes and the oppressed, who are the real country, and the ruling classes who are united, despite their differences and borders, for the defence of the operating system. Those who have not learned from past experience are dangerous for their people and for democracy.

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