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Beyond Empire?

The European debate functioned as a forum in which Labour fought over its political identity and purpose. In the 1960s and 1970s, it permitted a rhetorical reaffirmation of the commitment to "anti-imperialism" as both sides fought to harness it to their respective causes. The same applied to Germanophobia and anti-Americanism, as well as to Labour's commitment to some eventual form of "world government".¹⁰⁰ At a deeper level, however, the debate about EC membership also showed how attitudes which had earlier rendered Labour ambivalent about disbanding the empire shaped the party's responses to European integration. In particular, Britain continued to be exalted as uniquely able to contribute to the sum of world harmony, through both economic development and superpower détente. There was, of course, a serious divide between those who argued that this was most likely to be achieved through the Commonwealth – the scion of empire – or the European Community. Beyond this, however, the debate about Europe forced the main protagonists to compete for the allegiance of those holding quite homogeneous views of Britain's place in the world and their party's foreign policy aims. By doing so, it confirmed their centrality to Labour's political sense of self.

"A COMPLEX QUESTION ABOUT THE REMNANTS OF EMPIRE":¹ THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE FALKLANDS WAR²

DAVID STEWART

The Falklands War of 1982 was the last military conflict to be fought independently by Britain. Although it occurred in a post-colonial era in which the United Kingdom had ceased to be a "Great Power", the prominence of imperial imagery was a feature of the conflict.³ It was presented by the media and the Conservative Party as atonement for the humiliation of the 1956 Suez Crisis, signalling the reversal of Britain's perceived decline. The war also represented a turning point in the Thatcher era, acting as a launch pad for a generation of Conservative Party hegemony. Debate, led by Max Hastings, Simon Jenkins, Richard Thornton, Hugo Bicheno and Lawrence Freedman, has tended to focus on the diplomatic and political origins of the conflict and the conduct of the military campaign.⁴ Social scientists, such as Paul Whiteley, Harold Clarke, William Mishler, David Sanders, Hugh Ward, and David Marsh have concentrated on the conflict's role in reinventing Margaret Thatcher's premiership.⁵

¹ Tony Benn, *The End of an Era: Diaries 1980–90* (London: Arrow, 1994), 202.

² I would like to thank Stephen Meredith, Billy Frank and Craig Horner for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

³ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 258.

⁴ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (London: Pan, 1983).

⁵ Harold Clarke, William Mishler and Paul Whiteley, "Recapturing the Falklands: Models of Conservative Popularity, 1979–83", in *British Journal of Political Science* 20, no. 1 (1990), 63–81; David Sanders, Hugh Ward and David Marsh,

¹⁰⁰ Cotton, "Labour and European Integration", chap. 3.

Yet despite Stephen Howe's contention that the Falklands conflict "prompted a host of [centre-left] historians to start thinking about... patriotism and national identity in Britain",⁶ the Labour Party's responses to the war have largely been overlooked. No in-depth study of Labour Party strategy has been published, leaving interested scholars dependent on the highly partisan memoirs, diaries and biographies of leading Labour Party protagonists, and Anthony Barnett and Clive Christie's brief contemporary accounts of the British left and the Falklands War.⁷ Although labour historians and social scientists' preoccupation with internal Labour Party factionalism and domestic policymaking during the 1980s is understandable, an examination of the party's response to this pivotal event in the Thatcher era is long overdue. The conflict posed a stern challenge to the Labour Party's often inchoate anti-imperialist, democratic socialist and pacifist traditions. Indeed, the party leader Michael Foot, and his foremost left-wing opponent Tony Benn embodied this dilemma.

This chapter seeks to place the Labour Party's responses to the Falklands War in the context of the party's historic anti-imperialism and post-war foreign policy. The positions of the party leadership, backbench MPs, Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), and trade unions are considered, revealing the extent to which Labour's handling of the Falklands crisis was shaped by left/right divisions and factional alliances. The contrasting personalities of Foot and Benn underpin the chapter. Emphasizing the importance of media coverage in influencing popular attitudes towards the conflict, it also scrutinizes the Falklands campaign's impact on Labour's electoral fortunes. The chapter begins by outlining the nature of the British-Argentine dispute over the Falkland Islands.

Labour and Empire: Labour Party Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Falklands Conflict, 1945-75

Argentina's claim to the Malvinas, which were situated 8,000 miles from the United Kingdom in the South Atlantic, stemmed from its sporadic occupations of the Islands in the period 1820-9, when Spanish imperial

power was dissolving in South America.⁸ The Falkland Islands officially became a British colony in 1833, acting as a fuelling station for the Royal Navy. Its small population primarily consisted of Scottish and Welsh sheep farmers shipped there by the British government to provide a permanent presence. From 1875 the Falklands was controlled by the Falkland Islands Company, which owned two-thirds of the farms on the Islands. In 1880, Argentina requested the return of the Falklands, establishing a diplomatic pattern in which its claim was raised at thirty-year intervals.⁹ During this period, Argentina became a British economic and commercial dependency, attracting a sizeable British settler population. Following Argentina's assertion of sovereignty over South Georgia in 1927, however, British-Argentinean relations gradually deteriorated, and during World War Two Argentinean support for the Axis powers led Britain to send troops to protect the Falklands.

After 1945, the decline of the British Empire combined with the rise of Peronism to heighten Argentine interest in the Islands.¹⁰ Peronism, which united trade union and industrial interests behind the cause of Argentine economic modernization, took its name from the Argentine President, General Juan Peron, who propounded a xenophobic form of "integral nationalism". By harnessing nationalist sentiment over the Malvinas, Peron added to his popular appeal and diverted attention from Argentina's stagnating economy. Despite Peron's exile in 1955, the Malvinas remained a frontline issue in Argentine politics, and in 1965, the United Nations (UN) recognized Argentina's right to negotiate with Britain over sovereignty.

The 1964-70 Labour government was unprepared for this development. The Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was drawing from a shallow pool of distinctive Labour Party foreign policy ideas. Labour's belief in its historic anti-imperialism, based upon the party's perceived opposition to militarism, nationalism, racism, and dictatorships, was central to the Labour Party's self-image. However, post-war Labour foreign policy had been shaped by pragmatic internationalism, placing particular emphasis on collective security, and the upholding of democracy and human rights. Rhiannon Vickers asserts that these sentiments owed

"Government Popularity and the Falklands War", *British Journal of Political Science* 17, no. 2 (1987), 281-313.

⁶ Stephen Howe, "Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post-Colonial Trauma", *Twentieth-Century British History* 14, no. 3 (2003), 293-4.

⁷ Anthony Barnett, *Iron Britannia* (London: Allison and Busby, 1983); Clive Christie, "The British Left and the Falklands War", *Political Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1984), 288-307.

⁸ Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 6-7.

⁹ Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 19-25.

¹⁰ J. C. J. Metford, "Falklands or Malvinas? The Background to the Dispute", *International Affairs* 44, no. 3 (1968), 463.

more to radical nineteenth-century liberalism than socialism.¹¹ Despite notable decolonizations in India and Palestine, the Attlee governments favoured colonial development over self-determination. Labour's preference for a paternalistic commonwealth was built upon the imperialist assumption of a British global role. The party adopted an Atlanticist stance in the cold war, and sanctioned a British nuclear weapons programme. Labour was also a founder of the UN in 1947 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949.¹² This set the framework for a loose political consensus on foreign policy, embracing collective security, Atlanticism and a nuclear deterrent, intended to maintain Britain's "Great Power" status.

Although the Labour Party leadership's pragmatism provided British foreign policy continuity, reassuring the electorate of Labour's patriotism,¹³ it undermined the pursuit of socialism by diverting public expenditure away from the welfare state and nationalized industries, thereby inhibiting redistribution. The imperialist financial underpinnings of the party's opponents in the City of London were overlooked. Even left-wing opponents of the consensus, such as Foot, who had forged his political and journalistic reputation through the condemnation of appeasement in *Guilty Men*,¹⁴ operated on the premise that Britain was a "Great Power", wielding international influence that should be used to promote democratic socialism and nuclear disarmament. Foot's vision blended "regretful but firm anti-communism" with unwavering commitment to parliament, the Commonwealth and the UN.¹⁵ Consequently, a coherent socialist post-imperial foreign policy failed to emerge. Instead, Labour differentiated itself from the Conservatives by denouncing doctrines of racial superiority, affirming the brotherhood of man, and advocating redistribution of wealth from the richer to poorer countries.¹⁶

¹¹ Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, vol. 1: *The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy 1900-51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 192-3.

¹² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 238-9, 279-84.

¹³ Stephen Howe, "Labour Patriotism, 1939-83", in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 1: *History and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1989), 132-3.

¹⁴ Michael Foot (with Peter Howard and Frank Owen), *Guilty Men* (London: Gollancz, 1940).

¹⁵ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Michael Foot: A Life* (London: Harper Collins, 2007), 125.

¹⁶ John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 193-4.

The Suez Crisis acted as a watershed, altering the nature of the consensus. After a period of prevarication, the Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, opposed British military action, calling for a UN settlement.¹⁷ Suez exposed Britain's financial reliance on America, undermining its claim to "Great Power" status. Thereafter, decolonization became integral to the foreign policy consensus. Assumptions of British "Greatness" were gradually eroded, as foreign policy focused on managing the retreat from Empire, and locating a new world role. The Wilson governments bid for European Economic Community (EEC) membership, refused to commit troops in the Vietnam War, and established the Department for Overseas Development (DFOD), which provided financial assistance to New Commonwealth and third-world countries. As C.M.M. Cotton demonstrates, rhetorical anti-imperialism remained central to the Labour Party's moral self-image, and the DFOD won widespread acclaim from party members anxious to atone for Britain's imperial past. Wilson also initiated military withdrawal from east of Suez, reducing Britain's cold war commitments. The failure to implement commonwealth sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa and the government's impotence following Southern Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence, however, were condemned by a cross-section of the Labour Party. John Young concludes that although Wilson 'created a sustainable policy', he did so 'more by muddle and a collapse of alternatives than any long-term vision'.¹⁸

When the Falklands issue arose in 1965 it was deemed of peripheral significance.¹⁹ Labour highlighted the rights of the 1,800 islanders, who wished to remain British, while initiating a gradual process of disengagement. Wilson's Conservative successor, Edward Heath, encouraged Argentina to improve transport communications with the Falklands in the hope of eroding the Islanders' opposition to Argentine control. During 1974 the new Labour foreign secretary, Jim Callaghan, discussed joint British-Argentinean development of the Falklands' oil reserves.²⁰ The previous year, British entry to the EEC raised the prospect of a new post-imperial role as the bridge between Europe and America. At the 1975 EEC Referendum, however, left-wing opponents of membership, such as Foot, MP for Ebbw Vale, and Benn, MP for Bristol South East,

¹⁷ Philip M. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell* (Oxford: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 278-92.

¹⁸ John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970*, vol. 2: *International Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 226.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁰ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 461-2.

condemned the prospect of abandoning the Commonwealth for a "rich man's club".²¹ Benn had been moving rapidly leftwards since 1970 and his Marxist-influenced views differed significantly from Foot's 'undocinaire ethical socialism'. Benn laid claim to the mantle of anti-imperialism by associating British entry to the EEC with an establishment project to "transform the troublesome natives of Britain...into the subjects of a new imperialism".²² Arguing that Britain had become the "last colony in the British Empire" through the surrender of sovereignty to America, the EEC and multinational companies, Benn called for the Labour movement to lead a "national liberation struggle".²³ The Labour Party was split, precipitating bitter internal divisions and jeopardizing the foreign policy consensus.

End of Consensus: The Path to War, 1976-82

In the midst of this uncertainty, the Falklands issue became increasingly volatile. In 1976, a quasi-fascist military junta seized power in Argentina, executing Marxist opponents and arresting socialists and trade unionists.²⁴ That year the former Labour leader of the House of Lords, Lord Shackleton, published a report recommending £13 million of investment in the Falkland Islands' infrastructure to facilitate economic expansion and greater independence from Britain.²⁵ Coinciding with the International Monetary Fund crisis and substantial reductions in public expenditure, Shackleton's proposals were rejected by the Labour government.

Meanwhile, an Argentine bid to purchase the Falkland Islands Company was blocked, and the British ambassador was withdrawn from Buenos Aires after the Argentine navy fired on a British Antarctic survey ship. When British intelligence uncovered Argentine plans to invade the Islands in 1977, the prime minister, Callaghan, sent a nuclear submarine and two frigates to the South Atlantic to warn off the Junta.²⁶ Callaghan's actions were welcomed by the Labour Party, which supported the British Argentina Support Campaign, pressing for a ban on arms sales to the

²¹ Morgan, *Michael Foot*, 274.

²² Tony Benn, *Arguments for Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), 164.

²³ Tony Benn, *Arguments for Democracy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 3-17.

²⁴ Richard Thornton, *The Falklands Sting: Reagan, Thatcher, and Argentina's Bomb* (Washington DC: Brassey's, 1988), 4-19.

²⁵ Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 28-30.

²⁶ Morgan, *Callaghan*, 594.

Junta, and a policy of providing refuge to Argentine political prisoners.²⁷ The trade unions, which formed the organizational and financial hub of the Campaign, demanded that diplomatic pressure be exerted on Argentina to reintroduce basic trade union and human rights. Callaghan suspended negotiations over a proposed lease-back arrangement on the grounds of excessive Argentine belligerency, and introduced a Latin-American refugee scheme, but continued to permit arms sales to the regime.

Diplomatic relations with Argentina remained frozen until Margaret Thatcher's victory at the 1979 general election. Rejecting the inevitability of post-imperial decline, Thatcher forcefully pledged to renew Britain's nuclear capability and revitalize British-American relations. She envisaged Britain as America's foremost partner in the cold war and had little interest in the Commonwealth, which "provided a stage for post-colonial posturing by nationalist leaders happy to squeeze as much aid as possible from Britain".²⁸ In Thatcher's eyes, the Conservative Party was leading a post-colonial mission to destroy the preconditions for socialism on a national and global basis. If successful this mission would reverse British decline. Her primary imperial concerns were reaching settlements over Rhodesia and Hong Kong.²⁹ The Conservatives' Falklands' strategy was guided by America, which viewed the Junta as a bulwark against the spread of socialism in South America.³⁰

Thatcher's government accelerated arms sales to the Junta, removed the amnesty for political prisoners and restarted negotiations over sovereignty.³¹ The junior Foreign Office minister, Nicholas Ridley, a close ally of Thatcher, favoured a leaseback arrangement, whereby Britain would transfer sovereignty to Argentina while continuing to govern the Islands in the medium term. In 1981, the Nationality Act removed Falkland Islanders' rights to full British citizenship, further complicating the sovereignty question. That year, a Defence Review recommended the

²⁷ Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC), Judith Hart Papers, Hart 6/11, *Argentina: The Trade Unions Fight On* (London, British Argentina Campaign, 1978).

²⁸ John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, vol. 2: *The Iron Lady* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), 319.

²⁹ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 71-8, 259-62.

³⁰ Modern Records Centre (MRC), University of Warwick, Trades Union Congress (TUC) Archive, International Department Files on Latin and South America 1981-1982, MSS.292D/980/3. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) attributed the Junta's growing confidence to the right-wing Republican, Ronald Reagan's election as American President in November 1980.

³¹ LHASC, Michael Foot Papers, MFL19, Events Leading up to the Conflict.

withdrawal of the sole naval patrol ship HMS *Endurance* from the South Atlantic by the autumn of 1982. Richard Thornton contends that these actions were part of an elaborate “sting”, devised by American President, Ronald Reagan, and Thatcher, to encourage an invasion of the Falklands, which could be used as a pre-text for military intervention to topple the Junta, which was close to developing a nuclear weapons capability.³² This would strengthen Thatcher’s domestic standing, preserving New Right leadership on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thornton’s analysis, however, is questionable, as America possessed the economic leverage to undermine the Junta without resort to a proxy war. Furthermore, British military success was not guaranteed, and it was not in America’s strategic cold war interests to destabilize its relations with South America. Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands on April 2, 1982, facing minimal resistance. When parliament was recalled the following day, for its first Saturday sitting since the Suez Crisis, Thatcher, already beset by record post-war unemployment, unrest in the “inner-cities” and the lowest poll ratings of any previous prime minister, was in an exposed position. Her decision to despatch a naval taskforce to the South Atlantic, 8,000 miles from the United Kingdom, represented a huge military and political gamble. On the surface, it appeared an ideal opportunity for the opposition to exploit.

Speaking for Britain? Labour Party Strategies, April 3–21, 1982

The Labour Party, however, had descended into bitter left/right in-fighting following the 1979 general election defeat. The future ideological trajectory of the party was at the heart of debate. A left-wing grouping on the National Executive Committee (NEC), led by Benn, sought to transform Labour into a vehicle for radical economic and social change through NEC control of the election manifestos and mandatory reselection of MPs.³³ In contrast, moderates and revisionists were intent on constructing a cross-class coalition to resurrect the social democratic consensus. Following the establishment of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in March 1981 by senior “liberal revisionists”, the Labour Party’s status as the main

³² Thornton, *Falklands Sting*, xvii–xxv.

³³ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism* (London: Verso, 2001), 168–76.

opposition party appeared in jeopardy.³⁴ The SDP highlighted infiltration of the Labour Party by the Trotskyite Militant Tendency, presenting Labour as infested with left-wing extremists. Militant encouraged social democrats and socially conservative CLP members to leave the Labour Party, exacerbating internal divisions.³⁵

Foreign policy was a central issue, with the debate over nuclear disarmament and EEC membership forming symbolic fault-lines. The Bennite left promised a decisive break with the consensus on foreign policy, condemning American policy in Latin America as imperialist and lending vociferous support to the Anti-Apartheid Movement.³⁶ Foot, who had been elected as Labour Party leader in 1980, was suspicious of the Bennite left’s ‘anti-parliamentary tendencies’, and focused on maintaining party unity, seeking to create an atmosphere of tolerance and trust. In pursuing this goal, however, Foot struck uncomfortable compromises with left-wing and moderate opponents, generating a sense of indecision and allowing internal divisions to fester. By April 1982, Foot’s ability to lead the party was under scrutiny.³⁷

Foot adopted an unexpectedly belligerent stance over the Argentine invasion of the Falklands, unequivocally supporting the decision to send a naval taskforce to the South Atlantic.³⁸ He asserted that Britain had a “moral duty, a political duty and every other kind of duty” to ensure that the islanders’ “association” with Britain was sustained.³⁹ Barnett argues that Foot’s rhetoric discredited his internationalist credentials and exposed

³⁴ Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, *The Birth, Life, and Death of the Social Democratic Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93; John Golding, *Hammer of the Left: Defeating Tony Benn, Eric Heffer and Militant in the Battle for the Labour Party* (London: Politico, 2003), 178–84; Stephen Meredith, *Labours Old and New: The Parliamentary Right of the British Labour Party, 1970–79 and the Roots of New Labour* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 13–18.

³⁵ Diane Hayter, *Fightback! The Labour Party’s Traditional Right during the 1970s and 1980s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 28–31.

³⁶ Stephen Howe, “Labour and International Affairs”, in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, eds., *Labour’s First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143.

³⁷ In May 1982, National Union of General and Municipal Workers (GMWU)-sponsored MPs discussed the possibility of removing Foot as party leader before the next general election. See Giles Radice, *Diaries 1980–2001: From Political Disaster to Election Triumph* (London: Orion, 2004), 70.

³⁸ LHASC, Labour Party Archive (LPA), Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) Parliamentary Committee (PC) Minutes, Apr. 3, 1982; Interview with Michael Foot on Dec. 12, 2007.

³⁹ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* (Apr. 3, 1982), col. 638.

him as a liberal imperialist.⁴⁰ Yet Foot viewed the Junta's actions as unwarranted fascist aggression. He was convinced that challenging the Junta was in the international interest and contended that Argentine democratic socialists would welcome Britain's statement of intent. Foot envisaged Labour's primary role in the dispute as ensuring parliamentary scrutiny of the government in order to expose Thatcher's compliance in allowing the invasion to occur. With this objective in mind, Foot declined Thatcher's offer to share military intelligence with the party.⁴¹ Demanding a UN-brokered settlement, Foot's strategy rested on the principle of collective security. He hoped that the party would unite behind this dual-track approach.

The strategy, however, reflected the extent to which Foot was torn between two conflicting interpretations of the dispute. On the one hand, his commitment to anti-appeasement and democratic socialism led him to oppose all fascist aggression, while on the other hand, Foot felt anxious over the parallels with the Suez Crisis, which he had so forcefully condemned whilst editor of *Tribune*.⁴² Labour's deputy leader and shadow foreign secretary Denis Healey was privately concerned by Foot's intervention, fearing that it would limit the party's room for manoeuvre.⁴³ He had been in Greece, and had not been contacted by Foot to clarify tactics. Healey drew direct parallels with the Suez Crisis. He was convinced that America would not allow British military intervention in the Falklands to destabilize its relations with South America.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Healey supported Foot's stance in order to maintain party unity.

Within the shadow cabinet and NEC, Foot paradoxically relied upon the support of moderates and revisionists engaged in bitter anti-left conflict to provide him with a majority. Revisionists, such as the shadow home secretary Roy Hattersley, MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook, tended to believe that Britain was obliged to intervene to uphold democracy.⁴⁵ Giles Radice, MP for Chester-le-Street, described the revisionists' watchwords as "no moral gestures, no mock heroics and no blank cheques".⁴⁶ With the local elections looming, they were determined that the party avoid being perceived as unpatriotic or pacifist. The shadow

chancellor Peter Shore, MP for Stepney, adopted a similar stance, while the shadow education secretary Neil Kinnock, MP for Bedwellty, then on the centre left of the party, supported the taskforce as a bargaining chip to achieve a diplomatic settlement.⁴⁷ Moderates, such as John Golding, MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, sought to appear in touch with working-class sentiment by adopting a combative, anti-fascist interpretation of the dispute.⁴⁸ In Golding's eyes, the Falklands debate represented another shibboleth of the internal war against the Bennite left. Describing the dispute as "a complex question about the remnants of empire", Benn contended that the "real interest there is the oil" and condemned the prospect of military conflict.⁴⁹ Eric Heffer, the shadow minister for European and community affairs and MP for Liverpool Walton, was the only NEC member associated with the Bennite left to deviate from outright opposition to the taskforce.

The leadership sought to vindicate its stance by highlighting official Labour Party policy, which linked the transfer of sovereignty with the restoration of democracy in Argentina. In doing so, however, Foot found himself at odds with the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror* and *Labour Weekly*, which opposed sending the taskforce, arguing that "the blood that needs to be spilt is the blood of political reputations".⁵⁰ Indeed, the Socialist International Committee for Latin America, the General Confederation of Labour of the Argentine Republic, and Argentine human-rights groups attacked the Labour Party's support for the taskforce, arguing that the campaign for democracy in Argentina was unrelated to the Malvinas.⁵¹ Meanwhile, by denouncing opponents of the taskforce as "appeasers", Healey and the moderates unwittingly endorsed the position of New Right-influenced tabloids, such as the *Sun*, which were intent on using the crisis to popularize Thatcherism. The *Sun* asserted that "A British citizen is either on his country's side – or he is its enemy", communicating the simple message that Britain, "can still...be 'Great'", to its predominantly working-class readership.⁵²

⁴⁷ LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 5, 1982.

⁴⁸ Golding, *Hammer of the Left*, 241–3.

⁴⁹ Benn, *The End of an Era*, 202–5.

⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror*, Apr. 5, 1982; *Labour Weekly*, Apr. 8, 1982.

⁵¹ Michael Foot Papers, MF/L19, Labour Party News Release, May 26, 1982; TUC Archive, MSS.292D/901/21, International Committee Minutes, 10 May 1982; Judith Hart Papers, HART 6/1, Letter from the Committee for Human Rights in Argentina on May 6, 1982.

⁵² *Sun*, May 7, 1982; Eric Hobsbawm, "Falklands Fallout", *Marxism Today* (Jan. 1983), 19.

⁴⁰ Barnett, *Iron Britannia*, 32–3.

⁴¹ LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 14, 1982.

⁴² Michael Foot Papers, MF/L19, scribbled notes on Falklands Crisis.

⁴³ Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Penguin, 1990), 496.

⁴⁴ LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 14, 1982.

⁴⁵ LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 5, 1982.

⁴⁶ Radice, *Diaries*, 66.

Developments amongst Foot's traditional centre-left allies in the Tribune Group were crucial to the balance of opinion within the party. At the previous year's party conference, a "soft left" Tribunite faction, led by Kinnoek, had broken away from the Bennite left and aligned itself with the moderates and revisionists in defence of the party leadership.⁵³ The Falklands dispute was the first serious challenge to the cohesion and purpose of the anti-Bennite, Tribunite "soft left". Despite scepticism over the despatch of the taskforce, the editor of *Tribune*, Dick Clements, gave the newspaper's approval to Foot's dual-track strategy.⁵⁴ Within the Parliamentary Labour Party, however, there was substantial opposition towards sending the taskforce, centring on the belief that its presence in the South Atlantic would heighten the prospect of escalation to full-scale war with Argentina.⁵⁵ Given heightened cold war tensions, there was also concern that the Soviet Union would intervene, widening the conflict. Others condemned the prospect of islanders being caught in military crossfire, and feared retribution against British nationals in Argentina. Unlike Foot's dual-track strategy, opponents of the taskforce favoured UN financial and economic sanctions to exploit Argentina's dependence on foreign loans and emphasised that the UN should take full responsibility for brokering a peaceful resolution to the dispute. The overwhelming majority of CLP motions endorsed this interpretation of the dispute, pressing Foot to use the invasion to highlight the limited deterrent offered by nuclear weapons.⁵⁶

Foot's tactics were reliant on America vetoing British military intervention, or the achievement of a diplomatic settlement, closely associated with Labour Party policy, which could be used as a platform from which to expose the Conservatives' incompetent handling of the dispute. Reagan, however, privately supported Britain, and the Junta was unwilling to engage in constructive dialogue, playing into the hands of Thatcher, who hoped to use successful military action to revitalize her premiership.

⁵³ Hayter, *Fightback!*, 19–22.

⁵⁴ Mervyn Jones, *Michael Foot* (London: Gollancz, 1994), 489.

⁵⁵ LPA, PLP Minutes, Apr. 22, 1982.

⁵⁶ Judith Hart Papers, HART 6/10, CLP Motions on the Falklands War.

Searching for Peace and Unity: The Outbreak of War and Internal Labour Party Dissension, April 21 – June 14, 1982

Following the outbreak of hostilities in South Georgia on April 21, Foot and Healey became increasingly desperate to broker a UN settlement, as a tidal wave of media-generated jingoism swept Britain.⁵⁷ However, by calling for a conditional ceasefire, dependent on Argentine withdrawal from the Islands, Foot confused his earlier belligerent rhetoric, creating a general sense of incoherence. The Labour Party also appeared impractical and unpatriotic to be insisting on a diplomatic settlement, entailing UN trusteeship of the Islands or shared sovereignty, when British forces were making advances. Christie argues that "the Labour leadership's hesitant and unconvincing support for the war exemplified the point that Labour has never managed to work out a consistent and distinctive view of Britain's place in the world".⁵⁸ In contrast, Thatcher formed a war cabinet and deployed "Churchillian" rhetoric to emphasize the independent nature of Britain's actions, combining "resonances of Victorian 'gunboat diplomacy' [with]...the popular experience and memory of the Second World War".⁵⁹ Joe Ashton, the Tribunite MP for Bassetlaw, sought to use his column in the *Daily Star* to puncture Thatcher's "furious flag-waving patriotism" by querying her World War Two service record, but the rest of the media would not carry the story.⁶⁰

Friction now began to emerge amongst revisionists, moderates and the "soft left" over the islanders' right to self-determination, and the prospect of a full-scale British invasion. Hattersley rejected the Falklanders' right to a "veto" over British defence and foreign policy, but the shadow health secretary Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP for Crewe, and George Robertson, MP for Hamilton, insisted that the islanders' wishes should be paramount.⁶¹ Kinnoek opposed an invasion on the grounds that it would sabotage diplomatic negotiations, while Healey, resigned to the loss of British sovereignty over the Falklands, insisted that a full-scale invasion was not feasible. In contrast, Shore argued that Britain was "morally in the right", and that Labour should not be seen as a "peace at any price party".⁶²

⁵⁷ LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 28, 1982.

⁵⁸ Christie, "British Left and the Falklands War", 301.

⁵⁹ Robert Gray, "The Falklands Factor", *Marxism Today* (July 1982), 10.

⁶⁰ Joe Ashton, *Red Rose Blues: The Story of a Good Labour Man* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 298–9.

⁶¹ LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 21, 1982; PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 26, 1982.

⁶² LPA, PLP PC Minutes, Apr. 28, 1982.

Although it was evident that the leadership's strategy was unravelling, the revisionist-moderate-"soft left" coalition on the NEC held, defeating a motion by Benn, urging immediate withdrawal of the taskforce, by fifteen votes to eight.⁶³

The TUC was vital in defending Foot's position. It issued a supportive press statement and secured international endorsement of Foot's strategy from the ICFTU and the Commonwealth Trades Union Congress.⁶⁴ The TUC justified its stance on the basis of solidarity with the Falkland Islands General Employees' Union, which opposed a transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. In reality, its approach was shaped by moderate and "soft left" unions intent on maintaining Labour Party unity and marginalising the Bennite left. Indeed, moderate and "soft left" unions, such as the GMWU, National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), limited official discussion of the issue at their conferences to conceal the undercurrent of unrest amongst left-wing trade unionists.⁶⁵ Official opposition towards the taskforce was largely restricted to the "hard left" National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), Fire Brigades Union and National Union of Public Employees.⁶⁶

During this period, opponents of the conflict became more vocal. Judith Hart, Tribune MP for South Lanark, established the cross-party Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands, which worked in tandem with Labour Action for Peace and the British Peace Assembly, campaigning for an unconditional ceasefire.⁶⁷ The Committee was bolstered by the selection of a leading Bennite, Chris Mullin, as *Tribune's* new editor.⁶⁸ Under Mullin's stewardship *Tribune* became anti-war, printing a reworded

⁶³ LPA, NEC Minutes, Apr. 28, 1982.

⁶⁴ TUC Archive, MSS.292D/20/15, General Council Minutes, Apr. 28, 1982; MSS.292D/901/21, International Committee Minutes, May 10, 1982; LHASC, *TUC Congress Report 1982*, (London: TUC, 1982), 214-5.

⁶⁵ MRC, GMWU Archive, Executive Council Minutes, May 22, 1982; *Report of 1982 GMWU Congress* (London: GMWU, 1982), 34-5, 45; TGWU Archive, General Council Minutes, June 7, 1982; NUR Archive, MSS.127/NU/1/1/111-112, General Secretary's Report to Annual General Meeting, June 28, 1982.

⁶⁶ John Prescott, shadow regional affairs spokesman and MP for Hull East, then a Tribuneite, disassociated himself from his union sponsors, the National Union of Seamen, over their support for the taskforce. See Colin Brown, *Fighting Talk: The Biography of John Prescott* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 198.

⁶⁷ Judith Hart Papers, HART 6/5, Falklands Crisis - Responses of the Peace Movements; HART 6/8, Labour Action for Peace Press Statement on Apr. 20, 1982; HART 6/2, British Peace Assembly Press Statement on May 5, 1982.

⁶⁸ Martin Westlake, *Kinnock: The Biography* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 192-4.

version of Foot's famous 1956 headline "Stop This Suez Madness", which proclaimed "Stop This Falklands Madness".⁶⁹ Mullin also published an open letter by former *Tribune* journalist, Anthony Arblaster, entitled "Will The Real Michael Foot Stand Up?", which accused Foot of being "carried along by [the] tide of revived imperialist fervour". Foot responded by highlighting his desire for a UN-brokered settlement and condemning the new regime's "infantile leftism".⁷⁰

Christie contends that, "it was precisely that section of the Left that had for years been arguing...for a principled foreign policy who were now arguing against the war on basically pragmatic grounds".⁷¹ However, he fails to appreciate that these groupings viewed the conflict as imperialist, seeking to revive jingoistic, militaristic and racist sentiment, which would be exploited by the Conservative Party. Arguments surrounding the anti-fascist nature of the war were condemned as hypocritical, given Britain's escalating arms sales to the Junta, enlistment of Chilean fascist support, and the City of London's ongoing handling of Argentinean financial transactions.⁷²

Pragmatic opposition, led by Tam Dalyell, the shadow science spokesman and centrist MP for West Lothian, focused on the economic worthlessness of the Islands and the logistical difficulties surrounding the military operation.⁷³ Following the sinking of the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* on May 2, Dalyell played an increasingly prominent role in opposing the war. Meanwhile, Benn proposed evacuating the Falklands and compensating the islanders for their losses on the grounds that it would create the preconditions for a UN settlement, and be more cost efficient than fighting a war.⁷⁴ He contended that it was immoral to spend £4 billion on a war at a time of record post-war unemployment and widespread cuts in public services. The Scottish Trades Union Congress and the NUM supported this line of argument.⁷⁵ Following a parliamentary

⁶⁹ *Tribune*, May 7, 1982.

⁷⁰ *Tribune*, May 14, 1982; *Tribune*, May 21, 1982.

⁷¹ Christie, "British Left and the Falklands War", 303.

⁷² Judith Hart Papers, HART 6/8, Campaign Against Arms Trade Press Statement on Apr. 6, 1982; *Tribune*, May 7, 1982.

⁷³ Michael Foot Papers, MF/L19, Letter from Tam Dalyell to Michael Foot on May 22, 1982.

⁷⁴ Judith Hart Papers, HART 6/11, *Tony Benn on the Falklands War* (Nottingham: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1982), 2-14.

⁷⁵ Glasgow Caledonian University Research Collections, Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Archive, General Council Minutes, July-Sep. 1982, Press Statement on June 22, p. 002862; At the 1982 NUM Annual Conference, the NUM President, Arthur Scargill, argued that Thatcher's "mad adventure of colonialism

debate on May 20, thirty-three Labour MPs voted against the war. In a vain effort to assert leadership authority, Foot sacked Dalyell and the shadow arts spokesman Andrew Faulds, MP for Warley from their frontbench positions on May 24. However, this only served to prompt the resignations of the shadow home affairs spokesman John Tilley, MP for Lambeth Central, and the shadow food, agriculture and fisheries spokesman Gavin Strang, MP for Edinburgh East.⁷⁶

The Militant Tendency attacked the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands as being detached from the confrontational reality of working-class life, concluding that Thatcher "would merely shrug her shoulders and laugh" at its pacifist demands.⁷⁷ Indeed, anti-war demonstrations tended to be confined to London, attracting crowds of 2,000–10,000.⁷⁸ Some protestors displayed banners proclaiming "Victory to the Argentine Junta", embellishing the media-generated perception that the labour movement was unpatriotic.⁷⁹ Kenneth O. Morgan accurately surmises that "the jingoism of wartime seldom helps a party of the left".⁸⁰ At the 1982 local elections, the Labour Party suffered a net loss of forty-seven council seats.⁸¹ The "Falklands effect" was felt most heavily in southern England, London, and parts of the Midlands, which were integral to the electoral balance of power. The party made limited progress in northern England, reinforcing its grip on South Yorkshire, but failing to retake Liverpool, whilst suffering heavy losses in Leeds and Bradford. In

[would] produce yet another round of closures as our share of the burden". See *National Union of Mineworkers Annual Conference Report 1982* (London: NUM, 1982), 344–5.

⁷⁶ John Tilley was a Co-operative Party-sponsored MP. Although the Co-operative Party leadership endorsed Foot's strategy, there was some discontent amongst the Co-operative Parliamentary Group and considerable opposition towards the war at Local Co-operative Party level. See National Co-operative Archive, *Co-operative Congress Report 1982*, (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1982), 50–1, 63.

⁷⁷ Michael Foot Papers, MF/L19, Ted Grant, *Falklands Crisis: A Socialist Answer* (London: Militant, 1982).

⁷⁸ The Peace Pledge Union called a Day of Action on 1 May that involved a variety of small-scale protests in over 30 towns, including the occupation of a Royal Navy recruiting office in Sheffield. See *New Statesman*, May 28, 1982.

⁷⁹ Eric Heffer, *Never a Yes Man: The Life and Politics of an Adopted Liverpudlian* (London: Verso, 1993), 195–6.

⁸⁰ Morgan, *Michael Foot*, 414.

⁸¹ *Labour Weekly*, May 14, 1982.

Scotland, results were more encouraging, reflecting the less jingoistic Scottish response to the conflict.⁸²

Foot's complex diplomatic argument, which contrasted sharply with Thatcher's populist jingoistic rhetoric, had limited appeal in an increasingly polarized wartime climate. The Labour Party's strategies were built upon the principle of collective security, and acceptance of Britain's diminished post-imperial status. By creating the perception that Britain could still operate as an independent international power, Thatcher's victory in the Falklands tapped a rich seam of dormant Anglo-British nationalism, which celebrated the United Kingdom's imperial past. Divided and bereft of a credible alternative, the Labour Party was unable to counter this upsurge in jingoism. The sole political beneficiary of the conflict was the Conservative Party, which linked victory in the Falklands with Thatcher's efforts to overturn the post-war consensus and restore British "Greatness".⁸³ Presenting the labour movement as an unpatriotic vested interest, inhibiting economic recovery and national unity, Thatcher harnessed the "Falklands Factor" to win a landslide victory at the 1983 general election.⁸⁴

A Lost Cause: The Labour Party's Falklands Campaign in Perspective

The Falklands conflict presented the Labour Party with a post-imperial foreign policy conundrum that neither the leadership nor anti-war opponents could solve. The reinstatement of democracy in Argentina was supported by the entire labour movement and British victory in the Falklands helped to achieve this goal. However, the previous Labour government had armed the Junta and, during the conflict, fascist Chile assisted the British war effort, discrediting notions of an anti-fascist crusade. Indeed, arguments surrounding British sovereignty and the islanders' right to self-determination were complicated by the Falklands' control by a private company. Although anti-war campaigners' interpretation

⁸² Jimmy Allison, *Guilty by Suspicion: A Life and Labour* (Glendaruel: Argyll, 1995), 95, 99.

⁸³ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 235.

⁸⁴ Speaking in Cheltenham on July 3, 1982, Thatcher proclaimed, "We have to see that the spirit of the South Atlantic – the real spirit of Britain – is kindled not only by war but can now be fired by peace... We know we can do it... That is the Falklands Factor... We have ceased to be a nation in retreat. We have instead a newfound confidence born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true 8,000 miles away."

of the conflict, which drew on the Labour Party's belief in its historic anti-imperialism, corresponded with CLP and Argentine socialist opinion, their acceptance of short-term Argentine control of the Falklands risked strengthening the Junta, which was persecuting fellow socialists and trade unionists. Furthermore, anti-war opponents were out of touch with working-class and public opinion, which overwhelmingly approved of Thatcher's action. Viewed through the prism of jingoistic media coverage, victory in the Falklands rendered Benn's contention that Britain was the "last colony in the British Empire" implausible.

John Golding's deluded assertion that the conflict "probably saved the Labour Party", by discrediting Benn and undermining support for the SDP, is testament to the depth of feeling generated by internal factionalism.⁸⁵ Although the revisionist-moderate-"soft left" alliance on the NEC remained intact, laying the preconditions for the Kinnock/Hattersley "dream ticket" leadership,⁸⁶ the war weakened the popular appeal of the Labour Party. Waning support for the SDP-Liberal Party alliance was at best of marginal benefit to Labour, which became increasingly debilitated as the conflict progressed. Existing divisions were deepened, new internal wounds inflicted, and the party's public image further tarnished. Foot's dual-track strategy could only succeed if a diplomatic agreement was reached or the taskforce was defeated or suffered heavy casualties, leaving the Labour Party leadership ill-prepared for British military advances. After hostilities commenced, they appeared impractical and incoherent, continuing to support the taskforce, while arguing in favour of a ceasefire and UN trusteeship of the Falklands when British troops were successfully fighting to recover the Islands.

Foot's strategy also took insufficient account of the media's role in presenting Labour Party policy. The overwhelmingly hostile media gave the party leadership little credit for supporting the taskforce, whilst castigating Foot for proposing a negotiated settlement. Indeed, in the public consciousness, extensive media coverage of Labour Party opponents of the war led the party to become associated with pacifism and appear unpatriotic, sabotaging Foot's delicate political balancing act. To compound matters, Foot found himself at odds with the pro-Labour press and his CND support base, further weakening his leadership authority and accentuating internal divisions. In effect, British military success in the Falklands left the Labour Party in a no-win situation, galvanizing Thatcher's post-imperial mission to destroy socialism.

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⁸⁵ Golding, *Hammer of the Left*, 243.

⁸⁶ Hayter, *Fightback!*, 23–7.