

Contents

1. The Iraq War and the Antiwar Movement.
John Riddell and Roger Annis
2. Is Iraq the New Vietnam?
Roger Annis and John Riddell
3. With the People of Iraq — Win, Lose or Draw.
Fred Feldman

Socialist Voice #1, April 2, 2004

The Iraq War and the Antiwar Movement

by John Riddell and Roger Annis

Socialist Voice was founded as a result of a discussion by its founders with supporters of the socialist newspaper The Militant on policy toward the war and resistance in Iraq. The discussion occurred between November 2003 and March 2004.

Following the March 20, 2004 day of protest against the occupation of Iraq, the differences between the two sides of the discussion widened and an organizational separation ensued. The following are letters written by John Riddell and Roger Annis to The Militant, and to leading members of the Communist League, a Canadian organization that supports The Militant. The Militant replied to only two of these letters..

Class-conscious workers always side with the oppressed nation

Letter to *The Militant*, printed December 22, 2003

In a reply to a reader in the April 28 issue, Argiris Malapanis wrote, “In a war between an imperialist power and a nation oppressed by imperialism, class-conscious workers always side with the oppressed nation—regardless of its political regime—and argue that the defeat of the imperialists in the war is in the interests of working people everywhere.” Today, U.S. and allied forces are carrying out a military assault “aimed at destroying remnants of the Saddam Hussein regime and others resisting the occupation” (December 1 *Militant*). In today’s context, how does the principle expressed by the *Militant* in April apply? Around what slogans can it be concretized?

John Riddell

How can solidarity with Mideast peoples be expressed?

Letter to *The Militant*, printed February 23, 2004

The “Reply to a Reader” in the January 12 *Militant*, discussing the November “anti-Bush” protest in London, correctly points out that “substantially more is required than ‘larger protests’ pleading to the rulers for ‘peace.’” It quotes Leon Trotsky’s 1938 statement that “only a revolutionary mass struggle against war and against imperialism...can secure a real peace.”

This sums up well communist policy on imperialist war in general and on interimperialist conflicts. But more needs to be said on working-class policy toward imperialist wars and occupations of oppressed peoples—particularly those now under way in Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan.

These wars certainly express interimperialist rivalries, but they are also wars of conquest in colonies or semicolonies.

As the *Militant* has often noted, in such conflicts communists side with the oppressed people, regardless of its formal leadership. Such solidarity lends support to national liberation forces and, where they do not yet exist, helps create the conditions for their emergencies well as helping to consolidate a workers vanguard in the imperialist countries.

Thus in 1938, even as Trotsky opposed illusions that pacifist efforts could prevent a war between “democratic” imperialism and Nazi Germany, he also favored active support for oppressed nations such as China against imperialist wars of conquest.

As the *Militant* has stated, this policy is equally applicable to the imperialist wars and occupations in the Mideast today.

With respect to Iraq, the *Militant* has stressed the obstacles represented by the military prowess of U.S. imperialism, the reactionary character of the Baathist current, and the political disorientation of antiwar protests. All this is true, and it makes the fight for withdrawal of imperialist troops more difficult—but not impossible.

I hope the *Militant* will say more on the transitional forms through which working-class solidarity with the Mideast peoples undergoing imperialist occupation can be expressed.

John Riddell

Antiwar protests serve a vital purpose indeed

Unpublished letter to The Militant, submitted February 23, 2004

I was disappointed by the “Reply to a Reader” that appears in the February 23 issue. The war against Iraq and subsequent occupation is a brutal policy of imperial conquest. This fact is not understood by many working people in the world, particularly in the imperialist countries. The *Militant* has a vital role to play in reporting on the facts of the occupation and to support the examples of resistance to it, both in Iraq and beyond.

The resistance to occupation within Iraq is dismissed in the Reply as “so-called” and described as largely limited to adherents of the Saddam Hussein regime. But I am regularly reading news reports of mass resistance in Iraq, including protests against arbitrary arrests and killings by occupation forces, and demonstrations for jobs, social services and the restoration of water and electrical services. Recently, there were demonstrations of hundreds of thousands in Baghdad, Basra and other major cities against an occupation-imposed “interim government”. It is surely not coincidental that armed resistance has been the most frequent in towns, such as Fallujah, that have seen the deepest mass protests against occupation.

Supporters of the ousted regime undoubtedly play a central role in many of the armed attacks on occupation forces. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that the occupation is deeply resented by the Iraqi people. That opposition appears to be growing. Communists should support without condition those in Iraq who are fighting for an end to occupation. This does not preclude condemning attacks by pro-Saddam Hussein forces or others whose actions only serve to strengthen the occupiers' hands.

Demonstrations of thousands and millions of people against the war and occupation have occurred worldwide since the buildup to war began. In commenting on one of the latest of these protests, in London during the state visit of George Bush November past, two writers in the January 12 Militant explained, "The protests...did attract tens of thousands of young people repelled by imperialism and its wars." A worldwide protest is scheduled next month, on March 20. Will the Militant publicize this day of action? The "Reply" would suggest "yes" when it explains, "It (The Militant) has urged participation in peace marches and other actions where such demands (unconditional U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and elsewhere) can be advanced..."

I think the Transitional Program, the 1938 founding program of the Fourth International, sets out a good stance toward those protesting war and occupation today in Iraq. In its section entitled, "The struggle against imperialism and war", it says the following: "In the pacifism and even patriotism of the oppressed, there are elements which reflect on the one hand a hatred of destructive war, and on the other a clinging to what they believe to be their own good-elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions.

"Using these considerations as its point of departure, the Fourth International supports every, even if insufficient, demand, if it can draw the masses to a certain extent into active politics, awaken their criticism, and strengthen their control over the machinations of the bourgeoisie." As an example of this approach, the program describes the Fourth International's support of the proposal by then-Senator Louis Ludlow for a nation-wide referendum on any proposal by the U.S. government to take that country into the impending World War Two.

Finally, the reply explains an important principle of communist thought as though it were also a tactical guide to action. "Antiwar demonstrations," it says, "however large, have never stopped imperialist wars, and will not stop them now." I could argue that strikes by workers have never stopped the exploitation of labor by capital in the past, and they won't stop it now, but that would not help decide whether and how to support a group of workers on strike. If antiwar protests serve to awaken the criticism of masses of people, then they will serve a vital purpose indeed.

Roger Annis

Don't let the threat of bourgeois pacifism knock us off our bearings in defending the oppressed peoples

A letter to the Communist League, March 21, 2004

The Toronto supporters' meeting today indicated that the Communist League is moving to a position of generalized opposition to actions against the occupation of Iraq. I am concerned that

in reaching this decision, the CL has given insufficient weight to the question of Iraqi self-determination. I believe that whatever position we take on these demonstrations, we must find a way to advocate measures to defend Iraq's right to freedom from imperialist rule.

1. The basis of communist policy on Iraq was well explained in Argiris Malapanis's article of April 29, 2003 (<http://www.themilitant.com/2003/6714/671436.html>). The article deserves to be reread in its totality, but its political core is the passage, "In a war between an imperialist power and a nation oppressed by imperialism, class-conscious workers always side with the oppressed nation—regardless of its political regime—and argue that the defeat of the imperialists in the war is in the interests of working people everywhere, including those living in the imperialist country. That's the position taken by the Bolshevik party under the leadership of V.I. Lenin, which led workers and farmers to power in Russia in October 1917." Communists applied this position, Argiris explained, by supporting Iraq against the U.S.-led invasion and by participating, with their own program, in the antiwar actions that were held at that time.

Over the past year, that war has continued in the framework of the U.S.-led occupation. But since last April, the CL has placed less emphasis imperialism's war against the Iraqi people, and more emphasis the war's character as an interimperialist conflict. At the supporters' meeting, comrades explaining the CL position referred exclusively to the interimperialist rivalries. But the war in Iraq is in fact two conflicts in one: a conflict between the U.S. and its imperialist rivals over which of them should be top dog in Iraq, and also a war of world imperialism as a whole against the Iraqi people.

2. I agree with the comrades of the CL that world imperialism is headed toward world war, and that our position should be closely aligned with that of Lenin in 1914 and Trotsky in 1939. I also agree with what comrades said today and at the forum yesterday about the reactionary character of bourgeois pacifism. However, the two great imperialist wars of the last century both had a dual character: the imperialist powers fought each other while simultaneously striving to maintain and deepen their grip on oppressed nations.

Opposition to pacifism does not exhaust the Bolshevik position on imperialist war. Bolsheviks also give full support, in times of interimperialist war, to liberation struggles of colonial peoples. Thus Lenin hailed the Easter Uprising of 1916, even though it was supported by German imperialism, and Trotsky called for active support to the Chang Kai-Shek government against Japan in 1938, although Chiang was aligned with U.S. imperialism.

We have a similar dual policy toward the conflict of Iraq: consistent opposition to Canadian nationalism and the Canadian imperialist state, and energetic support of Iraq's right to self-determination.

3. At the Militant Forum on Saturday evening, our speaker said that U.S. imperialism had won decisive gains during the last year in imposing its will on its imperialist rivals. But Washington has not imposed its will on Iraq, our speaker pointed out, and whether it can do so is still an open question. This fact indicates that Argiris's analysis of April 2003 still applies: our policy toward Iraq today cannot be determined by interimperialist frictions alone. The main issue at stake in

Iraq today is whether imperialism will succeed in stabilizing its direct control over the Iraqi government and economy.

In today's supporters' meeting, comrades justified non-support of the March 20 demonstration by pointing to the differences between Iraq today and Vietnam during the 1960s—particularly, the absence in Iraq of a liberation movement of similar calibre to the Vietnamese NLF. These differences certainly exist: imperialism is in an incomparably stronger position vis-à-vis Iraq than it was in its struggle in Vietnam. But to use these differences as a reason not to demonstrate comes dangerously close to putting conditions on our support for the Iraqis: we cannot march because they are too weak and too ill-lead. The Communist League, by contrast, has always insisted that support for the cause of national liberation must be unconditional.

In explaining why the anti-occupation marches are a dead end, CL comrades pointed to the fact that there is no national liberation movement in Iraq. That may be true, but we must be careful of exaggeration. There is plenty of national liberation sentiment in Iraq, enough to give headaches to the U.S. strategists. Indeed, if we carefully examine the Democratic Party (and Canadian government) position on the Iraq war, we find a nostalgia for the Saddam Hussein era, when the Iraqi masses were under firmer control. But the strength of Iraqi national liberation forces should have no bearing on our stand on solidarity. Effective support in imperialist countries for Iraqi self-determination will help create the conditions in which an Iraqi national liberation movement can emerge.

It may be that the U.S. government will succeed during the next 12 months in stabilizing its puppets' rule in Iraq. But our job is not to dwell on the prowess of imperialism but to point to the possibilities for resistance. And at this moment, as we said in our Saturday forum, the U.S. has not yet won its war against the Iraqi people.

4. While we have not yet received the *Militant's* coverage of the March 20 actions, it is clear that they were large and vigorous—surprisingly so, given that the U.S.-led occupation is now a year old. The position presented at our supporters' meeting is that these actions were mainly expressions of reactionary anti-Americanism, except in the U.S., where they expressed reactionary support for the Democratic Party. Let us assume that this position is correct. The fact remains that these actions were called under the slogan “End the Occupation” and rallied tens of thousands of participants who want to fight for that goal.

Unfortunately, the *Militant* sold on these marches contained no proposals on how to work for that goal. We should have criticized the wrong orientation of these actions and made proposals on the right way to fight for freedom for Iraq. Calling on militants to join our movement is not enough, because active support for oppressed peoples is an indispensable part of building our party. We must propose something on the Iraq issue—a better program for marches, or perhaps an alternative to marches. Making such a proposal does not commit us to take the lead in carrying it out. We probably do not have the resources for that. It is a statement of what objectively needs to be done.

5. The underlying issue in our stand on Iraq is the role of resistance by semi-colonial peoples to imperialist oppression in the world class struggle. In recent months we have said a great deal

about interimperialist conflicts and very little about the conflict between imperialism and oppressed peoples. Yet in imperialism's drive to world war, it is the Third World that is presently the target of military action and that is absorbing almost all the casualties. And it is in the Third World where the U.S. government has repeatedly, during the past year, failed to impose its will. The two sharpest conflicts of U.S. imperialism are with Cuba and China—vastly different countries that are yet both part of the Third World and both workers' states.

6. Evaluation of the March 20 actions seems to me to be a secondary issue. But a few things should be said:

a. We tend to confuse the pacifist longings of the working masses with the ideology of bourgeois pacifism. Trotsky discussed this issue in detail with the SWP in the late 1930s, and it is taken up in the Transitional Program. Trotsky insisted that we adopt effective tactics to link up with what is positive in workers' universal desire for peace. In the Iraq context, we can best do this by calling for support to self-determination for oppressed peoples.

b. We must not be put off by the fact that most participants in an action have nationalist and reformist illusions. This is true in any class-struggle action. What counts is the program of the action around which they have rallied.

c. The March 20 actions were not all the same. The Toronto and San Francisco actions, for example, were called around programs that were more radical than those in Vancouver and New York. We should judge actions case by case rather than making a blanket rule.

d. The slogans of the Toronto action were, "End the occupation of Iraq," "Troops out NOW," "Freedom for Palestine," and "Canadian Troops Out of Afghanistan." What do we think the slogans ought to have been? My initial impression is that the Toronto slogans were correct.

e. The Toronto action also had an articulate component advocating bourgeois pacifism, represented above all by the NDP, which made a forceful intervention around support for effective international bodies, meaning of course handing over Iraq to the UN. Would the action have been more progressive if the bourgeois pacifists had been excluded? This could easily have been done by adding a slogan, "United Nations Hands Off Iraq."

f. Our position on actions against the U.S. war has evolved through a series of stages. In the spring of 2003, the *Militant* called for building antiwar actions. After the fall of the Saddam regime, this position was no longer expressed. But in the February 23, 2004 *Militant*, Argiris wrote that the *Militant* "has urged participation in peace marches and other action where such demands [for "unconditional withdrawal"] can be advanced." Yet that position was not carried out with regard to March 20. What changed in the past month?

7. The Communist League stands alone among currents claiming to represent socialism in its deep understanding of the struggles of colonial peoples against imperialism. It is crucial now that we not let the threat of bourgeois pacifism knock us off our bearings in defending the oppressed peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other nations today under imperialist assault.

John Riddell

A great imperialist power has assaulted an oppressed colonial people and this has aroused massive opposition

A Letter to the Communist League, March 24, 2004

I am writing to express my opinion about the antiwar marches held around the world this past Saturday and to voice my concern with the Communist League's political stance toward these marches. If I understand correctly, the party opposed these marches because their fundamental character is that of expressions of bourgeois pacifism and/or support to the lesser imperialist powers that opted out of the war. I attended the march in Vancouver and that was not the character of what I saw. Nor is it what I have read about the protests in other cities and countries.

I estimate the Vancouver march at 15,000. The theme was "No to War and Occupation, Yes to Peace and Justice". The vast majority of participants were there to express their anger and opposition to the war in Iraq and subsequent occupation by imperialist forces. At the rally following the march, the speakers the most strongly applauded were those who urged continued mobilization against the occupation and against any new war threats. The information that I have received about the marches in Toronto and Montreal is that they had a similar theme of opposition to imperialist war.

In the "Reply to a Reader" by Argiris Malapanis in the February 23, 2004 *Militant*, he writes, "In numerous editorials and columns over the last year, the *Militant* has called for unconditional withdrawal of U.S. and all other forces not only from Iraq and Afghanistan, but from the Balkans, Korea, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and any other place Washington and its imperialist allies deploy their armies for plunder. It has urged participation in peace marches and other actions where such demands can be advanced even if the main organizers don't agree with such slogans." *The Militant* did not publicize nor urge participation in the March 20 marches. Has there been a change in position since he wrote these words?

These marches occurred at a critical time because the news from Iraq is all bad for the imperialists. Opposition to the occupation is on the rise because of the failure of the occupiers to restore basic life support services to the population and solve any of the pressing social problems that bedevil the country. This week, newspapers have reported on protests by unemployed workers in Basra. They fought back when British soldiers tried to break up their protest of the lack of jobs. There are similar reports almost every day from Iraq of working class protests. Meanwhile, the attempt by the occupiers to give the occupation a constitutional veneer is foundering, further revealing the weakness of their social base in the country and the limits of the military victory they scored.

An article in yesterday's *Globe and Mail* reports on the growing unease and dissatisfaction with the occupation among soldiers in the U.S. army. According to CBC Radio, there were protests against the war and occupation less than two weeks ago in Delaware and Washington D.C. by people with family members serving in the U.S. army. This, it seems to me, is an extremely important development that warrants attention in the pages of *The Militant*, and it further underscores the limits of the imperialists' achievements in the war in Iraq and their so-called war

on terrorism. There has not been a single article in *The Militant*, to my recollection, of the effects of the war and occupation on the thinking of the soldiers serving there in the imperialist armies.

Speakers at the March 20 rally in Vancouver drew attention to the ongoing violation of the sovereignty and right to self-determination of the Iraqi people. Several, including Noam Chomsky, correctly pointed to this as the fundamental issue at stake in Iraq. I have noticed that *The Militant's* coverage on this issue is almost non-existent. While Malapanis says that *The Militant* has frequently called for unconditional withdrawal of imperialist forces from Iraq, I looked at *Militant* issues going back to November 3, 2003 and did not find a single editorial with such a call. Equally important, there are no news articles to explain the brutality of the ongoing occupation and the multi-faceted resistance by the Iraqi people. Communists always stand with the peoples oppressed by imperialism in any conflict between the two. Has *The Militant* lost sight of this fundamental tenet because of its opposition to the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein or because it opposes those bourgeois figures trying to use opposition to the war to advance their particular interests?

Columns in *The Militant*, including the one cited above by Malapanis, have, I think, been disproportionate in their warnings about the danger of bourgeois pacifism amongst those protesting the war in Iraq. As documented in Fred Halstead's book *Out Now*, communists were in the forefront of the protests against the imperialist assault on Vietnam. They never took the political shortcomings of the movement's participants (and they were numerous) nor the presence of bourgeois figures seeking to politically hijack the movement (likewise numerous) as the starting point of their participation. They fought hard against the multitude of efforts prevalent at the time to derail protests against the war and counterpose proposals for the banning of nuclear weapons, organizing school lunch programs in working class neighbourhoods, or other such reformist and pacifist nostrums. They took to heart the following guideline from the *Transitional Program*, the founding program of the Fourth International:

“In the pacifism and even patriotism of the oppressed, there are elements which reflect on the one hand a hatred of destructive war, and on the other a clinging to what they believe to be their own good—elements which we must know how to seize upon in order to draw the requisite conclusions.

“From this point of view, our American section, for example, critically supports the proposal for establishing a referendum on the question of declaring war... Without supporting and without sparing illusions, it is necessary to support with all possible strength the progressive distrust of the exploited toward the exploiters.”

This political stance toward those protesting the war gave our parties the strongest platform from which to do battle with those like the NDP today who have nothing to say about the right of self-determination of the Iraqi people and in place of protests against the ongoing occupation, propose a Canadian nationalist campaign against the proposed U.S./Canada missile defense program. There is indeed a political battle to be waged with bourgeois and pacifist forces who are working hard to weaken and crush working class opposition to the imperialist war drive.

Those forces were very much present at the Vancouver march I attended. All the more reason to join in the closest possible alliance with those genuinely opposed to the imperialists' course.

Comrades often tell me, "Iraq is not like Vietnam", and list all the reasons why. Of course there are differences in the two circumstances, but we must also note the similarities. I think they are decisive. A great imperialist power has assaulted an oppressed colonial people and this has aroused massive opposition around the world, including in the imperialist heartlands. What's more, that opposition is not going away.

On the eve of war one year ago, Communist League members predicted the collapse of antiwar opposition once the war began. Allusions to the collapse of antiwar opposition in 1914 were cited in all discussions on the matter. But this has not occurred. Protests continue. The recent election in Spain was, for all intents and purposes, a referendum on the government's participation in the war, and the imperialist war alliance lost. The inevitability of new and potentially wider protest come the next imperialist war venture is a considerable factor in world politics. All of this creates unprecedented conditions for taking the politics of opposition to imperialist war ever deeper into the working class and thus expanding the communist vanguard in the world today. I fear that the Communist League's oppositional stance to those protesting the war is will make it difficult to realize the exceptional potential that these conditions allow.

Comradely,, Roger Annis

Socialist Voice #2, April 16, 2004

Is Iraq the New Vietnam?

by Roger Annis and John Riddell

The world's attention has been riveted this month on Iraq. Brutal assaults by U.S. forces have been met by fierce resistance across much of the country. This has dealt the occupiers a sharp political blow.

Thousands of Iraqis have taken up arms to oppose the occupation forces. Grass-roots solidarity between Iraqis of Sunni and Shiite communities is growing. Protests across Iraq have condemned the failure of occupation authorities to restore basic public services and to improve the catastrophic economic conditions. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have rallied to oppose the attempt to impose a U.S.-controlled constitution and government.

Entire cities, such as Fallujah, and large neighborhoods in other towns and cities have become "no-go" zones for the occupiers, who, in turn, have mounted sieges and carried out horrific acts of reprisal.

After a year of occupation, the U.S. and its allies seem further than ever from imposing their will on the Iraqi people. Around the world, people are saying, "Iraq is the new Vietnam."

Opposed camps

The comparison of Iraq to Vietnam is made by people in two opposed camps, for quite different reasons.

U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy and other capitalist political leaders raise this cry to pressure the U.S. rulers into allying more closely with its imperialist rivals and thereby to shore up the beleaguered occupation.

Opponents of the war and occupation, by contrast, refer to Vietnam in order to underline the gravity of events in Iraq and express their hope that the courageous Iraqi fighters, like the Vietnamese before them, will ultimately drive out the invaders and win their country's independence.

In this second sense, the comparison is accurate. In Iraq, as in Vietnam, the world's mightiest military power has hurled its formidable means of destruction at a small, poor, and defenseless nation—only to be confounded by a people that refuses to surrender and that fights back against all odds. But the comparison is helpful only if we understand how the Vietnamese won their long struggle for independence.

Revolutionary victory

In the course of a 40-year independence struggle, the Vietnamese people overcame numerous imperialist occupiers, principally Japan, France, and the United States. Taking inspiration from the Russian revolution of 1917, they forged an authoritative liberation movement, overcame the

phony division between “north” and “south” Vietnam, and carried out an anticapitalist social revolution.

Arrogant and merciless, the U.S. government refused to heed the voices of world protest against the war in Vietnam, even when a clear majority of U.S. citizens favored withdrawal. A succession of Democratic and Republican party administrations responded to every setback by extending the war geographically and escalating the level of destruction, until the number of Vietnamese dead numbered not thousands but millions.

The massive international movement against the U.S. war in Vietnam coincided with a rise of revolutionary struggles around the world. Radical, working-class governments came to power in countries such as Cuba and Algeria. In Africa and the Middle East, peoples threw out their colonial masters and achieved independence. Millions strove to carry out Che Guevara’s call to “Create two, three, many Vietnams.”

In Canada, the movement against the war condemned Canadian government complicity with Washington. It was reinforced by the rise of a mass struggle in Quebec for independence and by a rise of labor struggles throughout the country.

In the United States, the antiwar movement coincided with the revolutionary struggle for Black freedom. The fighting capacity of U.S. forces in Vietnam was sharply reduced as soldiers, influenced by the heroism of the Vietnamese people and the firestorm of protest around the world, became convinced that the war was immoral and unjust. By the early 1970s, the pillars of capitalist stability in the U.S. were beginning to shake.

Only when all other options were closed did the U.S. turn tail and run, shamefully refusing to pay a penny for the devastation it had caused Vietnam.

New beginning in Iraq

The Iraqi people, by comparison, are only now setting out on the long road to liberation. The progressive impulse of their 1958 national, democratic revolution was dashed by the Baath Party dictatorship under Saddam Hussein. Only now are they beginning to organize again, and they have not yet established an authoritative, progressive leadership. Among the world’s governments, their only reliable friend is faraway Cuba.

Yet this is a time of great economic uncertainty and instability in the imperialist home countries. Working people and youth in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere are told to accept the so-called “war on terrorism,” yet we find our conditions of life and work and our democratic rights under unprecedented attack. In most Third World countries, social catastrophe is unfolding. Latin America is gripped by a rise of mass struggles, most notably in Venezuela. In the Mideast, there is deep opposition to the brutal attacks on the Palestinian people and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Altogether, these are favorable conditions for bringing new forces into the fight against the occupation of Iraq and making the connection between struggles there and at home.

SOCIALIST VOICE / APRIL 2004 / 12

Mass demonstrations against the occupation will not in themselves convince the warmakers to change course. But they provide tangible solidarity with the embattled Iraqis. And they form an indispensable part of building a worldwide movement committed to driving U.S., Canadian, and other occupation forces out of the Middle East and, ultimately, overthrowing imperialist power entirely.

In Canada, we have a special responsibility to oppose the warmakers in this country. The Canadian government speaks hypocritically of peace while assisting the U.S. war in Iraq and sending its own forces to occupy Afghanistan, Haiti, and other countries.

May Iraq's April uprising inspire us to redouble our efforts for Iraqi independence and freedom. Let us continue to organize protest and resistance, demanding Occupation forces out of Iraq and Afghanistan; freedom for the Palestinians.

Socialist Voice #3, April 25,2004

With the People of Iraq — Win, Lose or Draw

by Fred Feldman

Editors' note: This issue presents comments by Fred Feldman on our article, "Is Iraq the new Vietnam," as well as on some arguments raised recently in the socialist press. The next Socialist Voice will present our reply, as well as comments received from other readers. We are also developing a website, where Socialist Voice correspondence will be available.

As we write, the U.S. government is boasting of its forthcoming assault on Falluja, where so many Iraqis have already fallen to the occupiers' murderous fire. We urge readers to join and build protest actions in your areas. —Roger Annis and John Riddell

Although I think Roger and John are very much on the right road here, I feel uncomfortable with an "Is it a new Vietnam?" axis. I think Iraq is pretty different, even as it emerges as a genuine mass *fight against the occupation* and against the *attempt*—not something that imperialism has achieved yet—to defeat and reshape Iraq's independence and sovereignty in the interests of U.S. imperialism. This fight has the *potential* to develop into a broader revolutionary struggle for the liberation of Iraq from imperialist domination, but today this is a struggle aimed at forcing U.S. and other foreign troops out of the Iraq and *restoring* the country's former independence.

I think "is it a new Vietnam" axis can lead to the imposition of a schematic model on struggles, which can then be transformed into criteria for our support. As in: "We should not be in solidarity with the people of Iraq in the struggle to end the occupation since 'it is not a new Vietnam as it lacks the following features of the Vietnam situation, etc.'"

But I do recognize "Is it a new Vietnam?" is a real discussion on a real subject, basically: Is this becoming a popular nationalist struggle capable of forcing U.S. imperialist to abandon the occupation and the attempt to impose a U.S.- controlled regime on Iraq?

A debate for our enemies

This is quite different than the question, "Is it a 'quagmire'?" This is entirely a debate for our imperialist enemies and their journals, etc. Vietnam was not a "quagmire" for us. Iraq is not a "quagmire" for us. Vietnam was an expression of the international class struggle against colonialism, occupation, for national unity, and against landlordism and capitalism. Iraq is a struggle to end U.S. occupation and reassert their independence and sovereignty and, if the masses grow strong enough and throw up an adequate leadership in the process, to go forward from there as far as they can get. The Vietnamese struggle and its consequences inspired worldwide opposition to imperialism and solidarity including a massive movement in the United States. Iraq today is inspiring an antiwar response, especially among the countries which have sent troops for the U.S.-led war. The countries where a fight against the war is beginning include the United States, which went through the experience of Vietnam and the antiwar movement in an intense way.

Of course, if imperialist politicians start losing confidence and talking about a “quagmire,” that is good for our side in the struggle. That’s not our debate. We have no interest in slapping the critics of the administration in the face and yelling, “Stop bleating! Shape up! There’s no quagmire! Stay the course!”

But we also don’t tell working people to support getting out of Iraq because it is a “quagmire,” but because it is a struggle of our brothers and sisters in a just cause.

Is imperialism strong enough?

One of the big differences with Vietnam is who is shaking up the status quo. In Vietnam, it was the masses that tried to conquer new ground—independence, national unity, land reform, and overturn imperialist domination. This posed questions rather sharply: are the masses strong enough, organized enough, do they have an adequate leadership? Over time, for the goals that were fought for, the answers turned out to be yes. The war of liberation took 30 years.

In Iraq, it is imperialism that has shaken the status quo. It is U.S. imperialism that has radically de-stabilized an already unstable situation. It is U.S. imperialism that has taken on the task of destroying the gains of the anticolonial revolution in Iraq and reshaping the country in their interests. It is imperialism that has occupied and is trying to destroy the existing relations and structures and mass attitudes that constituted the independent sovereign Iraq, with all its limitations, that had been won. This poses the question: Is imperialism strong enough, at home and abroad, to accomplish this overturn today. If they are not, then the possibility exists of freeing Iraq from occupation and ending the attempt to reverse these gains *before a leadership and movement of the caliber of Vietnam has been forged, and before a communist leadership exists*, although through a mass struggle that advances toward this goal.

I don’t think imperialism is strong enough today, and I think that is part of the reason that Iraq is seen in some bourgeois quarters as something of a potentially ruinous adventure. I don’t think imperialism has the strength on the home front for this today, and I don’t think the colonial revolution has been rolled back sufficiently to really make this possible. U.S. imperialism is being driven in this direction by the whole crisis of the system, but carrying out a project of this scope requires much more stability and reaction on the home front, and much more and deeper defeats for the colonial struggles.

An element of adventurism

I believe there is a necessary and growing element of adventurism in U.S. foreign policy. They must seek to defy and change the relationship of forces in their favor, an element of what Hitler did in waging war against Russia and the United States and England at the same time. Not an exact parallel, but just because imperialist policies arise from necessity does not eliminate the element of adventurism. Look at the current threats to nuke North Korea—which must be taken *very seriously*, adventurist or not. U.S. imperialism is being pushed, fundamentally by economic difficulties and resulting sharpening interimperialist competition and popular resistance to the consequences of the crisis, in the historical direction of radical solutions that require transforming the home front as well as countries like Iraq and Haiti (to cite another case).

Official Washington proceeded in the occupation of Iraq on the assumption that the colonial revolution is over, finished, done for, and no longer presents an effective obstacle to imperialist reconquest and reshaping of the Middle East and elsewhere. They also assume that the consequences in the United States of the Vietnam war and the radicalization of the 60s and early 70s have either been rolled back, or completely absorbed to the benefit and strengthening of imperialism. My estimate is that are wrong on both counts.

Questions of tempo

Overall, however, imperialism is *weaker* than it was at the time of Vietnam, less able to crush genuine popular struggles. It is highly unlikely for instance that it will take 30 years to force an end the occupation of Iraq. Possible like many things are possible, but not highly likely. Iraq is already well ahead of my speculative schedule for the growth of resistance—I expected Iraq to hit the present type of situation in two or three years, not one. The opposition the U.S. rulers have faced at home from the beginning is a problem, and the U.S. rulers are paying a price politically and in Iraq for having defied it. It is more possible, not more difficult to defeat U.S. imperialism today than it was in Vietnam. That's why the current upsurge in Iraq presents such a sharp problem for them, although it is certainly not anything of the scope and power of the Tet offensive, for example.

I see no evidence, and I never have, that U.S. imperialism is strong enough to overturn Iraqi sovereignty and independence, and bend the people to its will. Remember, Iraqi independence and sovereignty did not simply disappear when the country was occupied. They represent a set of relations that, however incomplete and partial, were established in struggle. They have to be overthrown, and occupation has yet to do that job. The Iraqi people are not starting from ground zero—despite Saddam—but are defending existing conquests. This is not a near-impossible task for them, or one that requires a revolutionary leadership be forged as a precondition for victory, let alone for the struggle.

To adopt the idea that nothing can be accomplished to end the occupation or prevent the complete imperialist subjugation or reshaping of Iraq short of the formation of a communist leadership and an anticapitalist revolution is dead wrong, and shows a real contempt for the actual power of the mass struggle itself. The Iraqi people have set out on the road toward forming a genuine revolutionary leadership—the only road to this, the road of struggle. The formation of a genuine revolutionary leadership in Iraq will probably take longer than it will take to end the occupation of Iraq.

Iraq's allies

Let's not exaggerate the isolation of Iraq. It has many allies other than Cuba. It has the Spanish masses, who appear to be advancing toward forcing the removal of troops despite the claims that the people of these countries cannot affect these questions by protests. It has the people and government of Venezuela, although new counter-revolutionary challenges are approaching there. The Venezuelan government has been quite consistent about this, including refusing to isolate Iraq. There is a deepening revolutionary crisis in Bolivia. There is the Non-aligned movement, which is re-emerging as a factor as the impotence of the UN (as far as any progressive goal is

concerned) is exposed. And there are the masses in the Middle East who have shocked and surprised the imperialists before and are going to do so again.

We should not say that the struggle will be either long or short. What does long mean? 30 years? Five years? What does short mean? A week? Ten years? We support the struggle, however long it takes. We should not suggest either directly or indirectly or by implication that the occupation of Iraq can only be ended by the socialist revolution, or by a movement under communist leadership. Of course, the masses have to come forward and that is beginning to happen, and, of course, that immediately *begins* to change the leadership, to forge new leadership.. We should not, by word or implication, make getting rid of the bourgeois nationalist leadership a precondition for the fight or the victory, anymore than we should say that no strike can win unless you get rid of the bureaucrats. I think we should be confident that the Iraqi people will develop the organization and leadership necessary to defeat the occupation and regain their sovereignty and independence. We should not “hope” it. We should assert it with the conviction that the future belongs to working people, not the imperialists.

Of course, our basic class position does not hinge on whether the Iraqi people are capable of ending the occupation in the historical short run (not a month or a year) or even whether the United States today is capable of occupying and subjugating Iraq in the long run. We are with the people of Iraq against the occupation, win, lose, or draw.