

Australasian Spartacist



Supplement

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Afghanistan — Hail Red Army!

One month ago the Red Army of the Soviet Union marched into Afghanistan to put down a CIA-backed counterrevolutionary insurgency of barbaric tribal chieftans, mullahs and landlords. The US imperialists have seized on this action to whip up a Cold War style frenzy against the Soviet Union unmatched since the 1950s, launched the biggest military build up since the Vietnam War and rushed to the defence of the motley collection of Afghan reactionary gangs. There are only two class camps in the conflict over Afghanistan, and Trotskyists know where they stand -- for the gains won by the Russian workers in the October Revolution, against the coalition of reactionaries of every description headed by the war-mad leaders of US imperialism. Just as it has been since October 1917, the question of the Russian revolution is the decisive criterion separating genuine proletarian revolutionaries from all varieties of capitulators to the bourgeois class enemy.

Contrary to the ravings of imperialist politicians and media mouthpieces about sinister Soviet plots to gain a "warm-water port" or "open the road to India", in the age of the jet plane and the ballistic missile Afghanistan has no strategic geographic military importance. The pro-Soviet regime of the People's Democratic Party in Kabul, placed in power by a military coup in April 1978, was a government of modernising nationalist intellectuals based on a section of the officer corps. Its modest attempts to implement a few reforms -- a limited redistribution of land; the reduction of the bride price, through which women are bought and sold as chattel; an attack on illiteracy and in particular a program to extend education to women -- provoked armed resistance and then open insurrection from the village headmen, landlords and Afghanistan's 200,000-strong caste of mullahs. When the Afghan army failed to quell the CIA-backed insurgency, the Kremlin stepped in to defend its threatened clients.

Frequently -- in Egypt, the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere -- the Russian bureaucracy aids regimes which are in no way more progressive than their neighbours or internal opponents, and which no less frequently turn on their Soviet allies. Trotskyists do not support these reactionary ploys of Kremlin foreign policy. But in Afghanistan the Red Army is fighting to defend the limited reforms of the Kabul government against an enemy which skins alive Russian tourists and murders Communist school teachers.

Why we say "Hail Red Army!"

Even before the Soviet intervention we said that the victory of the Islamic insurgents in Afghanistan would mean the perpetuation of feudal and pre-feudal enslavement well into the last quarter of the 20th century. For that reason we have called for the military victory of the Kabul regime over the defenders of *purdah* and the *shador*. The direct deployment of Soviet troops and confirmation of the reactionary rebels' imperialist ties have changed the terms of the conflict. As Carter's Persian Gulf flotilla stands by to strike in the tinderbox of Central Asia -- Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan -- defence of the USSR itself is directly posed. In the face of the imperialist uproar over the Soviet military intervention, the international Spartacist tendency proclaimed: "Hail Red Army!"

Down with anti-Soviet boycotts!

What about the hue and cry over "plucky little Afghanistan"? The hypocrisy of the imperialist mass murderers knows no bounds. The US Marines have installed more puppet dictators for Washington than you can count. Exactly how many millions they killed and maimed in Vietnam might never be known. Right now Australian and British imperialist troops are helping shore up racist white supremacist rule in Rhodesia, but for that the bourgeois press has nothing but praise.

Now Carter is full of moral fervour when he decrees Starve Russia grain boycotts and places bans on the supply of modern technology. Fraser -- speaking on behalf of the Australian capitalist class, loyal lapdog of US imperialism -- has

chimed in with "tough" bans on just about anything Russian, so long as they don't cost too much. Such pin-pricks aren't likely to hurt the USSR a lot, but revolutionaries oppose all these anti-Soviet acts, including the Carter/Fraser call to boycott the Moscow Olympics. Unlike the liberal athletes opposing the ban, communists are not sports purists who fantasise about international sport "free from politics". But we oppose the Olympics boycott because it is a diplomatic attack by US imperialism on the Soviet degenerated workers state, one momentarily important in mobilising popular support for Washington's war drive. Oppose Carter/Fraser's Cold War iron curtain! Let the Olympic team go to Moscow!

It is not just "cold" war, however, that the capitalists will instigate. For over thirty years Washington has sought an imperialist alliance against the USSR. The new anti-Soviet axis was already foreshadowed by Washington's complicity in last year's Chinese invasion of Vietnam. Carter's target is the Soviet Union. And the threat of the new realignment taking shape is imperialist war to obliterate the conquests of the October Revolution.

Reformists join imperialist war drive

It's no surprise when Hayden -- who wants the bosses to put him in charge of Australia's junior imperialist state -- attacks Fraser's "tough" measures only because they are "ineffective" against the USSR. Likewise his rival for ALP leadership Bob Hawke, veteran of uncounted sellouts of striking workers, and a range of union bureaucrats extending beyond the rabidly anti-communist pro-NCC groupers. But the imperialist mobilisation extends to those who claim to stand to the left of the Labor Party as well. The Communist Party (CPA) was quick to proclaim that it opposed the Soviet action and joined Carter and Fraser to call for Soviet troops out. Here is the true face of the CPA which split from Moscow over its invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 after backing every Kremlin betrayal of the working class for decades: at bottom not a protest against Stalinist suppression of workers democracy, but the social-democratic drive to serve its own capitalist class as left prop. *Tribune's* hypocritical whining about Fraser's "war hysteria" only provides a faintly left-wing echo of Hayden: for a *rational* campaign against the Red Army incursion.

It is the Stalinist regime of China which continues to be the principal supplier of small arms to the Islamic reaction in Afghanistan while the US arms Pakistan, in what a Washington official described as a "rational division of labour". Peking's political agents in this country are as usual fronting for this counter-revolutionary alliance. Eureka flags flying, they stand in the vanguard of the anti-Soviet agitation together with every extremist, anti-working-class rightist gang in the country. In Canberra Maoist union bureaucrats like Peter O'Dea spat on the best traditions of the class struggle by putting up a reactionary picket line under union auspices to stop deliveries to the Soviet embassy. *Picket lines mean don't cross -- so this one should be removed by the labour movement.*

International Socialists unmasked

On January 18 the left-talking International Socialists (IS) joined the brazenly reactionary Maoists in Melbourne to demonstrate against "Russian imperialism" and "Russian aggression in Afghanistan" -- *together with notorious Nazi Ross ("the Skull") May, the Christian Mission to the Communist World, and the Baltic Council of Australia!* Nothing could demonstrate more obscenely that the real political foundation of the IS is not "militant" shop-floor reformism, petty-bourgeois "worker talk", "fight the fascists" rhetoric or even occasional adventurism. All that is subordinated to the IS' *pro-imperialist program* of "CIA socialism", from Korea to Vietnam and now Afghanistan -- the true defining feature of this political current since its birth as a revisionist split from Trotskyism.

"Against Imperialism, East and West", bleats the IS; but they come out openly for the *military victory of the Afghan reactionaries* in a disgusting issue of the *Battler* (26 January)! What has become of the "third camp"? There never was one, so the *Battler's* feeble attempt to cover up its *open support* for anti-Soviet trade bans with a "demand" for fantastical "even-handed" boycotts of the US as well falls flat. Anyway *why should* the IS want to boycott the US when it, too, is trying to achieve the "military victory" of the "Afghan rebels"? Is the USSR "bureaucratic collectivist"? "State capitalist"? Some sort of classless "imperialism"? The IS doesn't care as long as it doesn't have to defend the collectivised property forms which persist despite the parasitic rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy. But none of these "theories" will help the IS explain why the "imperialist" Red Army is fighting *on the side of progressive reforms* against all the most reactionary components of Afghan society -- and the CIA. *We challenge the IS to explain to the working-class public in open debate why it joins with the Nazis in defence of feudal/tribal slavery against the Soviet Union.*

SWP shuns defence of the Soviet Union

Next to the local Moscow liners of the Socialist Party (SPA) who have been cowering in near silence behind the corpse of "detente", even the usually staid, Human Rights social democrats of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) come out looking like staunch partisans of Moscow. The SWP is a little out of character running around with headlines proclaiming the revolutionary role of the Soviet Red Army. It wasn't so long ago that the SWP proclaimed the "revolutionary" credentials of pro-imperialist Soviet dissidents like Leonid Plyushch, who now warns the West to boycott the Olympics and prepare for World War III, or Andrei Sakharov, whom the Kremlin branded, correctly, a traitor for demanding Soviet withdrawal.

In fact the weird SWP paper rhetoric about the "Afghan revolution" gives the game away; the SWP can rationalise siding with the Red Army only by inventing out of whole cloth a mythical "workers and peasants" "insurrection" supposed to have brought the present regime to power (*Direct Action*, 17 January). The same issue proclaimed feebly that "we support the *right* of the Soviet workers state to take measures necessary to protect itself against imperialist military threats". Since then *Direct Action* has dropped even this liberal counterfeit of the Trotskyist demand for unconditional military defence. Those waiting for the SWP to put its money where its mouth is better not hold their breath; the SWP has already boycotted a Spartacist League rally in solidarity with the Red Army action in Sydney on January 17, and it has now pulled out of another scheduled for February 8 in Melbourne -- after announcing at a January 23 planning meeting that they would be in it.

Nor has *Direct Action* so much as mentioned the fundamental Trotskyist call for *political revolution* to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy. In fact the SWP's line parallels that of the Kremlin's Cuban Stalinist allies whom the SWP tails -- to the extent of apologising for the reactionary and bloody Derg dictatorship in Ethiopia and the criminal role of Cuban and Soviet troops in propping it up. Like the Stalinists, they cynically promoted the Iranian ayatollahs -- who have always been on the opposite side in Afghanistan as well as in Iran -- to the point of apologising for Khomeini's re-imposition of the veil. Since they like Khomeini so much, why aren't they on the other side in Afghanistan, explaining how the *chador* there too is a "symbol" of "anti-imperialist resistance"?

The SWP's sellout to Khomeiniite reaction is a better guide to its real politics. These are the same people who *refused* to call for military victory to the NLF during the Vietnam war; who denounced calls for labour strikes against the war as "ultraleft"; and who came out in 1975 for the reactionary onslaught in Portugal against the Communist Party, a murderous campaign organised by the social democrats and funded by the CIA. That same year in Angola the SWP professed "neutrality" in the civil war between the Soviet-backed MPLA and the CIA/South African-backed rebels -- until, embarrassed after the fact by this counterrevolutionary stand, they decided to try to falsify their own history.

And what of the SWP's vaunted "international", the "United Secretariat"? Counterposed to each other in the past over Chile, Portugal and Angola, and now reeling from a major split which ripped out a third of its forces, the different wings of this shattered bloc are at it again. This time two of the largest European groups, the British International Marxist Group and the French LCR, have joined the imperialist chorus of "Soviet troops out"! Attacking the CPA, SWP honcho Poulsen denounces such a stand as being "on the side of the counterrevolutionary camp" (*Direct Action*, 24 January) *So which side is the USec on, Comrade Poulsen?* The USec is neither Trotskyist nor international -- the Fourth International of Trotsky must be reformed in struggle against these feuding revisionist gangs!

A coterie of "independent" left-wing gadflies in Melbourne gave a lesson in capitulation at the planning meeting for the upcoming Melbourne rally. Here Paul White, Franz Timmerman and their friends, including members of the so-called "Trotskyist Study Group", moved in on the SWP's natural political habitat: cowardly social-democratic pacifism. Formally standing to the *right* of the SWP, they fought hard, and successfully, *against* calling the rally to defend the Soviet Union in Afghanistan or otherwise -- it would "alienate" people, they said! Instead they are hoping to make the rally an inoffensive, national-parochial social-pacifist show, refusing to take sides in the Afghan conflict so that even those like the CPA *who are for "Soviet troops out"* can back it. The SWP has now pulled out altogether. But we will be demonstrating on February 8 with our own contingent and slogans to defend the Red Army action and the Soviet Union.

Extend the social gains of October to the Afghan peoples!

Despite wishful thinking in the West, Soviet forces are clearly capable of suppressing the disorganised, poorly armed Afghan tribalist rebels. What will then become of the country? In the absence of any but the most rudimentary proletariat the essential ingredients for the liberation of the Afghan peoples must come from outside this region. If the country is effectively incorporated into the Soviet bloc this can today be only as a *bureaucratically deformed* workers state. Compared to present conditions in Afghanistan this would represent a giant step forward. The sharp contrast between the condition of women in Soviet Central Asia and that in *any* Islamic state provides an index. But the road to a socialist future of economic plenty and internationalist equality lies in a proletarian political revolution to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy. This in turn must be linked with socialist revolutions from South Asia to the imperialist centres.

The Kremlin and its flunkies in the SPA will predictably launch a "peace offensive" to "isolate the warmongers" and "revive detente". To this we respond as did the American Trotskyist leader James P Cannon in the 1950s: "The class struggle of the workers, merging with the colonial revolutions in a common struggle against imperialism, is the only genuine fight against war. The Stalinists who preach otherwise are liars and deceivers. The workers and colonial peoples will have peace when they have the power and use their power to take it and make it for themselves. That is the road of Lenin. There is no other road to peace."

1 February 1980
Spartacist League

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