

Pseudo-left endorses imperialist onslaught against Syria

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11 April 2017

Nearly 16 years after the beginning of the “war on terror” and more than a quarter-century after the first Gulf War in 1991, the unending imperialist war drive is entering a new and more dangerous stage. In the aftermath of the Trump administration’s air strikes against Syria, the US media and political establishment, parroting the official propaganda line used to justify the attacks, is demanding even more aggressive action against Syria and Russia. There is the very real danger of a direct military conflict between the US and nuclear-armed Russia, with incalculable consequences.

And yet, fourteen years after the mass protests against the Iraq war in 2003, there does not exist any organized anti-war movement. With each successive war, accompanied by ever more brazen propaganda and lies, the level of organized popular protest has diminished. This is despite the fact that among broad sections of the population there is profound disquiet and hostility to the warmongering of the government. How is this to be explained?

It is impossible to answer this question without analyzing the role of the nominally “left” political parties and publications that have become vocal cheerleaders for US regime-change operations. Included among them are the International Socialist Organization (*Socialist Worker*) and the Pabloite *International Viewpoint*.

For years, these organizations have been among the leading proponents of the United States’ destabilization operation in Syria, and, before that, in Libya. To the extent that they opposed the foreign policy of the Obama administration, it was to criticize it for being insufficiently committed to removing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power. A similar line is now being developed under Trump.

Between Tuesday, when the entire US media initiated a campaign to blame the government of Assad for the Khan Sheikhouh attack in preparation for a military strike, and Thursday, when the Trump administration ordered an air strike against Syrian government forces, both *Socialist Worker* and *International Viewpoint* maintained radio silence.

Immediately after Trump’s air strikes, they both sprang into action. While nominally opposing the air attack, their response was characterized by 1) promotion of the lies of the CIA as good coin and 2) criticizing the Trump administration for not

really seeking regime-change. Their aim, above all, was to demobilize opposition to American imperialism.

Writing in *International Viewpoint* on April 9, Frieda Afary and Joseph Daher threw their full support to the fraudulent narrative about Assad’s “weapons of mass destruction.” Their article states: “The chemical bombing of innocent civilians ... perpetrated by the Assad regime and its allies, Russia and Iran, on April 4 is yet another step in the murderous campaign to destroy what is left of the popular opposition to the Assad regime.”

As with the bourgeois media and political establishment in the US and Europe, they present no evidence for this blanket assertion.

They add, “Clearly, no peaceful and just solution in Syria can be reached with Bashar al-Assad and his clique in power.”

The target of their invective is not the US government, which is seeking to subjugate the people of the Middle East, but any and all political organizations that criticize the CIA-backed “revolution” in Syria, equating opposition to the US imperialist war for regime-change with support for Assad. Thus, Daher and Afary conclude with a chant: “Not Leftists, Not Leftists, Those Who Stand with Bashar al-Assad.”

Along the same lines, Philippe Poutou, the presidential candidate of France’s Pabloite pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), made clear on April 8 that his organization will oppose any effort to build an anti-war movement in opposition to US intervention in Syria. “We will not join the protests of the French political parties, who, in order to advocate a ‘reasonable’ peace with El Assad and his minions, close their eyes to the hundreds of thousands of dead killed by the dictator and the millions of displaced and refugees.”

This reactionary justification of the NPA’s de facto endorsement of French intervention in Syria entirely ignores the basic distinction, upon which Marxists insist, between imperialist states and their former colonial possessions. The attitude of a genuine French socialist movement is not determined by cataloguing the crimes of Assad, but, rather, by the economic nature and historical role of French imperialism. The removal of Assad cannot be assigned to blood-soaked representatives of the French Bourse or, for that matter, Wall Street. Their alternative to Assad is the partition of Syria,

whose various parts are to be ruled by hand-picked agents of imperialism. The reckoning with Assad can be achieved only through the revolutionary struggle of the working class of Syria and the entire Middle East on a clearly defined socialist, internationalist and anti-imperialist program.

Tellingly, *International Viewpoint* calls for the formation of “antiwar movements” in Russia and Iran, but not in the US. Such “movements” would be the incubators for regime-change operations in those countries, paralleling the CIA-backed Islamist organizations they support in Syria. Their opposition to the Putin regime is not from the revolutionary socialist left, but from the pro-imperialist right. They do not oppose the regime as the end result of the Stalinist betrayal and destruction of the October Revolution, or as the representative of a capitalist oligarchy whose wealth is based on the conversion of state assets into private property. The pseudo-left, rather, frames its opposition to Putin virtually exclusively within the fraudulent “human rights” rhetoric of the CIA.

In *Socialist Worker*, the ISO’s Ashley Smith writes that “no one should be surprised by Assad’s willingness to violate the agreement [of 2013] and use chemical weapons.” Adopting the line of the Democratic Party, Smith declares that it is “hard to take Trump’s humanitarian pretensions seriously” because until recently “Trump supported some kind of rapprochement with Assad and Russia.”

In doing so, the ISO complains, the Trump administration “made explicit what had been implicit under Barack Obama—that the US would tolerate Assad staying on in power as a de facto ally for the sake of the war on ISIS.” The main problem with the policy of the US is that it “has turned a blind eye while Russia, Iran and Hezbollah intervened in support of Assad’s counterrevolutionary war to save his dictatorship.”

Thus, the ISO, along with *International Viewpoint*, aligns itself with the CIA and those factions of the ruling class that have criticized Trump not for his extreme right-wing and warmongering policies, but for being too close to Russia.

The position of these organizations is the outcome of broader social and political processes going back a half century. The anti-war movement as it emerged in the 1960s was predominantly middle-class in character, drawing in radical sections of young people opposed to universal conscription and dissatisfied with the conservative cultural environment that predominated. The organizations that led this movement sought to prevent the fight against war from developing into a movement of the working class against capitalism.

Over the course of the ensuing five decades, the leaders of the anti-Vietnam War protest movement have traveled far to the right, in many cases themselves becoming leading figures in bourgeois politics. Ideologically, these social layers have ever more openly repudiated Marxism and embraced post-modernism and identity politics. Politically, they have taken up the “human rights” justifications of US imperialism.

This noxious concoction of right-wing political and

intellectual trends finds expression in a visceral hatred of Russia, a form of cold war anticommunism now directed at capitalist Russia. The denunciation of Russia, China and Iran as “imperialist” by these groups serves as a cover for their support for CIA-sponsored regime-change operations all over the world, including in Russia and China themselves.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has referred to such organizations as the “pseudo-left.” They use populist phraseology and identity politics to promote the socio-economic interests of affluent sections of the upper-middle class. They are pro-war and pro-imperialist, using the slogan of “human rights” to legitimize neo-colonial military operations.

Their political evolution reflects a social differentiation. Over the past 50 years, the top 10 percent of income earners have benefited substantially from the phenomenal rise in the value of stocks and other financial instruments, due in large part to the relentless decline in the wages and living conditions of the working class as a result of decades of betrayals by the labor unions.

Whatever their grievances with the top 1 percent, their interests are separated by a vast gulf from those of the broad mass of the population. Their stock market portfolios are dependent on the continued exploitation of the working class and, most critically, the global domination of US imperialism. The increasingly affluent position of this social milieu is reflected in its intellectual, cultural and, one might add, moral degeneration.

The renewed anti-war movement will emerge not from these middle-class layers, but from the working class. The most urgent task in the building of a genuine movement against war is the political exposure of these right-wing, middle-class political outfits and the social interests they represent.



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