

**TROTSKYIST BULLETIN NO. 8**

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# **AFGHANISTAN & THE LEFT**

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**INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY**

**Trotskyist Bulletin No. 8:**

# **Afghanistan & the Left**

**International Bolshevik Tendency**

First published February 2002

**International Bolshevik Tendency**

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## Introduction

This bulletin addresses political questions posed by events in Afghanistan since the 1970s. Part 1 contains materials by the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) related to the recent U.S.-led attack on Afghanistan.

The second part, divided into three subsections, deals with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan during the 1980s. The first subsection (Part 2a) contains an article summarizing the Soviet defensist position of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt), two articles by Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party documenting their evolution from ostensible neutrality to supporting the victory of the imperialist-backed Afghan *mujahedin*, and two articles by Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat.

In Part 2b we reprint a series of polemics between the Bolshevik Tendency (BT—forerunner of the IBT) and the Spartacist League/U.S. (SL—flagship of the iSt, now the International Communist League [ICL]) over the question of “hailing” the Kremlin's intervention in Afghanistan. The BT initially employed this formulation, but subsequently changed it to one of “military support” to the Soviets and their Afghan allies.

The final section (Part 2c) contains polemics regarding the SL's claim that it could recruit an international brigade to defend the Afghan government after the Soviet retreat. This section includes several relevant items from the iSt's Internal Discussion Bulletin.

International Bolshevik Tendency  
February 2002



# 1. Afghanistan Under Imperialist Attack, 2001

## Document 1.1

### *World Trade Center Terror Bombing*

## U.S. Imperialist Rule: An Endless Horror

*International Bolshevik Tendency leaflet, 18 September 2001*

The destruction of the World Trade Center on 11 September is a horrific act which the International Bolshevik Tendency unequivocally condemns. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers had friends or family members who lived, shopped or worked in the area. Unlike the personnel in the Pentagon (the command center of the U.S. military), the thousands of victims trapped in the World Trade Center's twin towers and the hundreds of passengers and crew on board the four hijacked airliners were civilians whose deaths we mourn. As revolutionary socialists we abhor terrorist attacks that identify ordinary citizens with their imperialist rulers.

The record of the U.S. ruling class includes many instances of mass murder, including the firebombing of Dresden and Hamburg, the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the massacre of over a million Vietnamese civilians in the 1960s and 70s. The current U.S. embargo on Iraq has resulted in the death of at least a million Iraqi children. However, the destruction of the World Trade Center is being treated by the imperialist media as an "attack on civilization" because this time American lives were lost.

The patriotic bloodlust whipped up in the U.S. over the past week has already resulted in a couple of murders and hundreds of racist attacks on Muslims, Arab-Americans, Sikhs and others perceived as "foreigners." It has played into the hands of America's pro-Israel lobby, and undercut popular sympathy for the Palestinian victims of the racist Zionist state.

In declaring "war" on as yet unspecified targets, America's rulers hope to achieve several objectives. Firstly, they wish to demonstrate that in a one "superpower" world, other countries better do as they are told:

"The [anticipated] blow [against Afghanistan's Taliban regime] would be intended not only to destroy terrorist bases in Afghanistan but also to demonstrate to other nations that there is a heavy cost to be paid for those who shelter enemies of the United States."

—*New York Times*, 17 September

The Cheney/Bush administration is openly seeking to channel popular outrage into support for a major (and potentially open-ended) military intervention in the Middle East, which would tighten the U.S. grip on this strategic region. America's most subservient imperialist allies—Britain, Australia and Canada—have given their unlimited support to whatever Washington decides. Support from Germany, France and other EU imperialists has been more qualified, while the Russians have opposed any U.S. military passage through the former Soviet republics bordering Afghanistan.

In the U.S., the "war" psychosis provides a useful pretext to expand police powers to run ID checks, control movements and interfere with private communications. Under the guise of combating terrorism, attempts will be made to limit free speech, free assembly and other civil rights. A sign of the new policy direction is the U.S. government's public declara-

tion that assassination will once more be considered a legitimate tool of foreign policy.

### The Real Enemy is at Home

The real enemy of workers, blacks and other minorities in the U.S. is not some shadowy Islamic fanatic in Afghanistan, but their own ruling class. Though U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has been supported passively (and sometimes actively) by a majority of the population, the objective interests of ordinary working people in the U.S. are counterposed to Bush & Co. This may come into focus more clearly as the implications of looting the Social Security and Medicare "lock box" to finance the upcoming military expedition (and bail out airline and insurance company shareholders) become apparent.

The workers' movement in the U.S. should be setting up union-based defense guards to protect Muslim neighborhoods, mosques and shops from attacks by the racist, flag-waving bigots who are being egged on by the chauvinist ranting of the corporate media. But the current pro-capitalist leadership of the unions is jumping on the jingoist bandwagon. In a statement released the day after the attack, AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, bragged:

"I have called President Bush to express the AFL-CIO's full support for him in this time of crisis and offer any and all assistance from the labor movement."

A class-conscious union leadership would be making preparations to launch political strikes in response to military aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq or any other neo-colony. As a step in the struggle to break the grip of the pro-imperialist labor bureaucracy on the unions, revolutionaries must win the advanced elements of the American working class to the recognition that their interests lie in opposing the blood-thirsty military adventures of their rulers.

A revolutionary socialist perspective for the Middle East must combine implacable struggle against Zionist oppression with exposure of the "anti-imperialist" pretensions of the petty-bourgeois leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and flat opposition to the reactionary, misogynist Islamicist fanatics. If the oppressed Arab masses equate American workers with America's rulers (or Jewish workers with their Zionist bosses), this only helps bind American and Hebrew workers more closely to their masters. Conversely, to the extent that Israeli and American workers identify with their "own" exploiters, they help cement the control of the sheiks, generals and mullahs over the Muslim masses.

Marxists oppose terrorism as a strategy for the liberation of the oppressed because, even in the best case, it substitutes the acts of a tiny handful for the conscious activity of the working class. But revolutionary Marxists differentiate between acts aimed at imperialist military targets and those aimed at innocent civilians. For example, we recognize that the demolition of the U.S. and French garrisons in Lebanon in 1983 by "Islamic Jihad" were defensible blows against impe-

rialist attempts to establish a military beachhead in the Middle East. Some supposed Marxist organizations flinched, including the left-posturing Spartacist League/U.S., which issued a social-patriotic call for saving the surviving U.S. Marines.

### Afghan Mujahedin: From 'Freedom Fighters' to 'Terrorists'

Osama bin Laden, the elusive figure the U.S. is blaming for the 11 September attacks, was a long-time CIA asset during the 1980s, when the Islamic fundamentalist *mujahedin* carried out a jihad against the Soviet Army and its left-nationalist Afghan allies. The *mujahedin* rebellion began when the modernizing, pro-Soviet government encouraged girls to go to school. The Afghan "freedom fighters" were not only supported by the imperialists, but also by a wide spectrum of the fake-left, including the adherents of Tony Cliff's International Socialist Tendency.

In August 1998, after the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa, Bill Clinton ordered aerial strikes against bin Laden's Afghan bases (which the U.S. had bought and paid for a decade earlier):

"The Afghan resistance was backed by the intelligence services of the United States and Saudi Arabia with nearly \$6 billion worth of weapons. And the territory targeted last week, a set of six encampments around Khost, where the Saudi exile Osama bin Laden has financed a kind of 'terrorist university,' in the words of a senior United States intelligence official, is well known to the Central Intelligence Agency.

"The C.I.A.'s military and financial support for the Afghan rebels indirectly helped build the camps that the United

States attacked. And some of the same warriors who fought the Soviets with the C.I.A.'s help are now fighting under Mr. bin Laden's banner."

—*New York Times*, 24 August 1998

The fact that bin Laden and his *mujahedin* friends were trained by the CIA has not featured prominently in the capitalist media during the past week. But it is evidence that the attack on the World Trade Center is only one link in a long chain of events. A massive imperialist military attack on Afghanistan and/or Iraq would be a catastrophe that would produce many thousands of additional innocent victims and ultimately strengthen the forces of Islamic reaction in the region.

### For World Socialism!

Revolutionaries must take a position of unconditional military defense of any neo-colony targeted for imperialist attack. It is the duty of class-conscious American workers to stand fast against the tidal wave of chauvinist filth and not lose sight of the historic interests of U.S. working people. The real threat to workers in the imperialist West does not come from bin Laden, Saddam Hussein or the Taliban, but rather from the cynical, racist imperialists whose global economic order created and nurtured them.

As Bolsheviks, we are committed to the struggle to create an internationalist world party capable of organizing the working class to overthrow the entire system of organized imperialist piracy. The only road to a future in which every member of humanity can enjoy a secure, peaceful and productive life lies through replacing the rapacious dog-eat-dog capitalist system with a planned socialist economy in which production is geared to human need. ■

## Document 1.2

### *Enduring Oppression and Infinite Injustice* Imperialism's Bloody Trail

*The following is an edited version of a talk given by Tom Riley at several campuses in the Toronto area in early November 2001. Reprinted from 1917 No. 24.*

We are a few weeks into a "war" between one of the poorest, most backward countries on earth and the world's biggest and most advanced industrial society (which also happens to have ten times the population). And the larger power is backed by a "coalition" that includes every other imperialist country (including "brave, neutral" Canada). The mighty United States Air Force is engaged in systematically "degrading" what little remains standing in Afghanistan after 20 years of continuous civil conflict. Simon Jenkins of the *London Times* (a traditional mouthpiece of Britain's conservative establishment) described the coalition campaign as follows:

"The current high-intensity bombing of Afghanistan is by no stretch of military imagination simply de-activating air defences or disrupting bin Laden's networks. It is strategic bombing of whatever passes for the Afghan State, its cities and people. The Pentagon openly calls it 'psychological bombing', the targeting of roads, power stations and public buildings (even those with red crosses on them). Since from the air Afghan troops are indistinguishable from civilians, the implication of using aerial gunships is that no ground operation can be risked if any Afghan is alive in the region. To those fleeing Afghanistan in their thousands, this is indeed terror repaying terror."

—*Times*, 24 October

So far more than a thousand Afghan civilians have been killed. Like the destruction of the World Trade Center, this is an exercise in monstrous criminality.

The U.S. was clearly going to make somebody pay for the attack on the "homeland"—but killing ten or a hundred thousand Afghans is not going to make the world a safer place for Americans or anyone else. Officially, of course, it is not a war on "Afghanistan," but on "terrorism," which the FBI and the U.S. Department of Defense define as:

"the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

The U.S. has used "force or violence" to coerce and intimidate civilians and overthrow other governments more regularly than any other state: in Guatemala in 1953, Brazil in 1964, Chile in 1973, Nicaragua throughout the 1980s, and there are lots of other examples. But none of them qualify as "terrorists" according to the FBI, because they were "lawful," that is, authorized by the U.S. government.

On 9 October, two days after the bombing began, U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte announced to the UN Security Council that Washington's "war on terrorism" could be visiting other countries after Afghanistan. Iraq is widely thought to be next on the list, but Syria, Libya and various others have

also been mooted as potential targets. John Pilger, writing in London's liberal *Guardian*, pointed out that Negroponte was a particularly grotesque choice as America's "anti-terrorist" messenger to the world because:

"As US ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s, Negroponte oversaw American funding of the regime's death squads, known as Battalion 316, that wiped out the democratic opposition, while the CIA ran its 'contra' war of terror against neighbouring Nicaragua."

—*Guardian*, 25 October

## Global Capitalism: Infinite Injustice

The capitalist world system headed by the U.S. is based on massive, unending violence against the vast majority of humanity in the service of funneling wealth from the poor to the rich within nations and between nations. The World Bank reports that half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day. Now, with economic indicators turning down, we are told to get ready for a period of generalized belt-tightening. For those trying to eke out an existence on \$2 a day or less, things are going to become even more horrific. The impoverishment of billions of unfortunates at one pole is, of course, "balanced" by the enormous accumulation of wealth and power by a tiny elite at the other.

After the attack on 11 September, the U.S. Department of Defense published an outline of current U.S. military doctrine, signed by U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. It proclaims that America has "enduring national interests" in "access to key markets and strategic resources" everywhere on the planet, and asserts a U.S. right to overthrow non-compliant regimes:

"U.S. forces must maintain the capability at the direction of the President to impose the will of the United States and its coalition partners on any adversaries including states or non-state entities. Such a decisive defeat could include changing the regime of an adversary state or occupation of foreign territory until U.S. strategic objectives are met."

—*Quadrennial Defense Review Report*,  
30 September 2001

The current "war on terrorism" is, above all, an exercise in "imposing the will of the United States."

## The Rise of Radical Islamism

To understand the chain of events that led to 11 September, we have to go back at least a few decades. In the early 1960s radical Islamic fundamentalists were generally regarded as a lunatic fringe by most of the Arab world—much as "creation scientists" are seen today in North America.

This began to change with Israel's victory in the 1967 Six Day War, when the Egyptian airforce was completely destroyed and Israel seized the Sinai peninsula. This shattered the prestige of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leading figure in the "Arab Revolution," who in 1956 had successfully nationalized the Suez Canal and resisted the joint British-French-Israeli invasion. The fundamentalists claimed that Egypt, the cultural and political leader of the Arab world, had been defeated because it had turned away from Allah to embrace secular modernism.

The big breakthrough for the Islamists came in 1979 when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini toppled Shah Reza Pahlavi's Peacock Throne and established an "Islamic Republic" in Iran. The Shah had come to power in 1953 in a CIA-engineered coup that overthrew the modernizing, nationalist regime headed by Mohammed Mosaddeq. To "stabilize" the Pahlavi dynasty, the CIA, with the help of Israeli intelligence, created SAVAK, Iran's notorious political police. SAVAK imprisoned, tortured and killed thousands of opponents of the re-

gime. Iran under the Shah, along with Israel and Saudi Arabia, was one of the pillars of American imperialism in the Middle East.

Islamic fundamentalism must, at bottom, be understood as a reactionary response to imperialist domination—an assertion by a section of the oppressed of their own cultural identity and a rejection of the values of their oppressors. One thing that radical Islamists (including Khomeini, bin Laden and the Taliban) have in common is opposition to social equality. They insist on the total and absolute subordination of women within the family, and their virtual exclusion from society. They are hostile to socialism, as well as Western capitalist ideology.

The "structural adjustment programs" pushed by the International Monetary Fund, and embraced by many domestic rulers in the region, opened the door to foreign capital penetration and cheap imports. Agriculture, indigenous manufacturing and many traditional occupations were dislocated by the sudden introduction of the "efficiencies" of the world market. The result was the growth of urban shantytowns full of impoverished former peasants who are today entirely dependent on the Islamic charities (run out of the local mosques) for healthcare, schooling and any other social services. These people constitute the mullahs' mass base and can be summoned into the streets at any moment. But the cadres of the Islamist movement are chiefly recruited from members of the scientifically trained intelligentsia, who feel that they, not the current gang of corrupt imperialist lackeys, should be in power.

## Imperialism & Reaction in Afghanistan

American intervention in Afghanistan dates back to 1978, when the CIA first backed Islamic reaction against the pro-Soviet Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The PDPA was a radical nationalist Stalinist formation, similar to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. In an interview published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (15-21 January 1998), Zbigniew Brezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, revealed that CIA support to the *mujahedin* predated the Soviet intervention:

"According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the *mujahedin* began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec 1979. But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise: indeed, it was 3 July 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul."

The interviewer asked Brezinski if, in hindsight, he had come to "regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?" He replied:

"What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?"

The mullahs, the moneylenders and the big landowners opposed the PDPA because of its decrees slashing debts, lowering the bride price (a major source of business for the moneylenders) and giving peasants the land they tilled. The PDPA had also abolished child marriage and initiated schooling for girls. The leaders of the "free world" instinctively sided with the Islamic reactionaries, just as revolutionaries defended the PDPA and their Soviet allies.

U.S. aid was directed toward the most fanatical of the *mujahedin* factions, on the grounds that they would be the most intransigent opponents of the Soviets. The U.S. also encouraged volunteers for the *jihad* to come to Afghanistan to

fight the infidel. One of those who answered the call was a young Saudi millionaire named Osama bin Laden. The CIA armed and trained the cadres of bin Laden's organization and built the "terrorist training camps" that the U.S. Air Force has been bombing.

When the Kremlin bureaucracy betrayed their Afghan allies and pulled out Soviet troops in 1989, the U.S. lost interest in the conflict. The PDPA regime held out for three years before finally being overwhelmed by the Islamists. But the victorious *mujahedin* warlords, currently gathered together in the "Northern Alliance," fell out among themselves in a savage power struggle which exacted a terrible toll on the civilian population.

Civil order in Pakistan was threatened by the continuing unrest across its border. The Pakistani intelligence agency, which had been the conduit for CIA support to the *mujahedin* throughout the 1980s, began to provide "active military support" to the Taliban, a fanatical Pashtun Muslim sect based in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. The Taliban enjoyed spectacular military success, toppling one warlord after another and in 1996 seized Kabul.

After taking power, the Taliban moved quickly to outlaw beard trimming, as well as music and dancing at weddings. They closed down all schools for girls and banned televisions, tape recorders, homing pigeons, and even kites. Under the Taliban, thieves are punished by amputation; adulterers are stoned to death; and political, religious and national minorities are brutally oppressed.

The discovery of major oil and natural gas deposits in Central Asia, immediately north of Afghanistan, in the early 1990s considerably increased Afghanistan's geo-political significance, as the U.S. Energy Information Administration noted in a December 2000 report:

"Afghanistan's significance from an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from central Asia to the Arabian Sea."

Initially, Washington welcomed the Taliban as a force for stability in Afghanistan. The State Department was pleased when the Taliban selected a consortium headed by UNOCAL, a major American oil corporation, to build a \$2 billion natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to Pakistan. There were plans for awarding a similar contract for the construction of an oil pipeline. This would have given the U.S. access to Central Asian gas and oil fields bypassing both Iran and Russia—its two chief rivals in the region. The deal fell through in 1998 after Al Qaeda blew up two U.S. embassies in Africa prompting Bill Clinton to retaliate by launching 20 cruise missiles at Afghanistan.

One objective of the American "war on terrorism," in addition to eradicating a hostile regime, is to increase U.S. leverage in Central Asia. The establishment of U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, both previously considered firmly within the Kremlin's sphere of influence, is a major step in that direction. The Russians have been assured that these installations are only "temporary"—but Putin no doubt recalls the solemn promises made to Gorbachev at the time the Berlin Wall came down that if the Soviets agreed to a united Germany remaining in NATO, no other former Warsaw Pact country would ever be allowed to join. Today Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are all NATO members, and most of the rest of the former Pact countries are on the waiting list.

### 'Spin Laden'

A source of considerable irritation for the "coalition" partners thus far has been the ease with which bin Laden has been

winning the "Spin War" for the hearts and minds of Muslims in the region. The explanation for this is pretty simple: bin Laden's program is in tune with what most people in the area want. He has pledged to call off Al Qaeda's *jihad* against the U.S. if three conditions are met. First, U.S. forces must leave Saudi Arabia, home to Mecca and Medina, Islam's two most holy sites. The second condition is that the sanctions against Iraq, that have killed over a million people, be ended. Thirdly, bin Laden demands an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and the creation of a Palestinian state on these territories.

Most Americans wouldn't find these demands objectionable, which is why they have been virtually blacked out. Bin Laden's ultimate program is of course to impose fundamentalist Islamic regimes throughout the Middle East, but as a first step his chief concern is to expel the "infidels" from the region.

U.S. attempts to extinguish "terrorism" have certainly elevated the status of Al Qaeda among disaffected Muslims. If tens of thousands of Afghan refugees end up starving or freezing to death this winter, that support seems likely to increase further. The rulers of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (both officially supporters of the U.S. campaign) are concerned that a prolonged conflict may destabilize their regimes. But Washington appears determined to try to break Taliban resistance from the air, regardless of the toll on Afghan civilians, before risking American ground troops.

### Taking the War to the Pashtuns

At this point it is difficult to predict the outcome of the conflict. The Taliban are deeply unpopular with many Afghans, but there is some evidence that the coalition terror bombing has solidified their support, just as the attack on the World Trade Center pushed up Bush Jr.'s ratings. The Taliban leadership appears to think their troops are well enough dug in to survive the worst that the U.S. Air Force can throw at them. The 26 October issue of Britain's Tory *Telegraph* reported that the elite U.S. Delta Force was taken aback by fierce Taliban resistance when they staged a brief raid on an abandoned compound in the Kandahar region on 20 October.

The Taliban strategy apparently involves drawing out the conflict long enough and grinding up enough American soldiers to force the U.S. to withdraw. This is the lesson they have drawn from Reagan's hasty retreat from Lebanon after the 1983 demolition of the U.S. Marine barracks, and Clinton's withdrawal from Somalia a decade later when 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in a firefight with the forces of a local warlord. However, in the wake of the World Trade Center attack, popular support in the U.S. for the assault on Afghanistan is much deeper than it was for intervention in either Lebanon or Somalia.

If the U.S. is serious about taking out the Taliban and creating a stable client regime in Afghanistan (rather than just providing aerial support for its Northern Alliance proxies or capturing Kabul) it will have to take the fight to the Taliban's base area around Kandahar among the Pashtun population which straddles the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. That could pose a whole new set of problems—as General Pervez Musharraf's government seems likely to be an early casualty of such an assault. Instability in Islamabad conjures up a lot of nightmare scenarios given Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

### The War at Home

The U.S. rulers are using the "war against terrorism" to attack the hard-won democratic rights (and living standards) of

American workers. More than a thousand people, mostly Arab immigrants, have been locked up indefinitely. The authorities are refusing to release their names or state what (if anything) they are charged with. There has also been talk of legalizing torture to speed up confessions, as they do in Israel. Here in Canada, Jean Chrétien's government, which has backed the U.S. campaign against Afghanistan at every step, is pushing "anti-terrorist" legislation that amounts to a blank check for the government to harass and incarcerate anyone they don't like.

The Bush Administration is using the current wave of xenophobic fervor to shower U.S. corporations with billions of dollars in *retroactive* tax rebates. It has also promised tens of billions in bailouts for the airlines and insurance companies. This is all going to be paid for by looting the social security "lock box" that was supposed to ensure that American workers don't have to spend their retirements living in cardboard boxes and eating cat food.

When U.S. workers realize that this "war" is being waged on two fronts—against Afghanistan and against *them*—we could see an eruption of class struggle in the American "homeland." It is worth noting that there is much less patriotic hysteria in the black population, which historically tends to be the most politically advanced section of the proletariat.

The job of Marxists in every country of the imperialist "coalition" is to struggle to win working people to see that they have an interest in *defending* Afghanistan against their "own" rulers. A single workers' political strike against the war could have enormous political impact internationally—particularly in the Middle East—and help lay the basis for joint class struggle in the future.

The Taliban are the mortal enemies of the oppressed and must be overthrown—but this task, like the removal of the rest of the reactionary regimes in the region, falls to the oppressed and exploited, *not* to the imperialists. The *worst* outcome of this conflict, from the point of view of working people here and in the Middle East, would be for the U.S.-led "coalition" to score the sort of lop-sided victory it did over Iraq a decade ago. A cheap imperialist victory would set the stage for larger-scale and bloodier campaigns in the future.

Most of the ostensibly socialist left has responded to the imperialist attack on Afghanistan with pacifist, liberal bleating. When Tariq Ali was in Toronto six weeks ago, we asked him if he, as a former "International Marxist," defended Afghanistan against imperialism. He answered with a flat "No!" The self-proclaimed Marxists of the International Socialists refuse to defend Afghanistan, and are instead pushing simple-

minded pacifist calls to "Stop the War." But the imperialists themselves want to "end the war" as soon as possible, as the 31 October issue of the *New York Times* reported:

"In the United States, some seem increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of the military campaign, and conservative politicians have begun to talk about escalating it by using ground forces on a larger scale. In Britain and other European countries, however, public opinion seems headed in the other direction. The European public appears more concerned about civilian casualties than *ending the war swiftly*."

—emphasis added

The U.S. rulers want to "end the war swiftly" by *escalating the killing!* We would like to see a swift end to the war as well—but only through the immediate withdrawal of the "coalition" aggressors. Demands to "stop the war" are fine for pacifists—but revolutionaries have a side when imperialist predators attack neo-colonial countries.

### Expropriate the Expropriators!

If a protracted imperialist campaign in Afghanistan goes badly, and casualties mount, it will strengthen the capacity of oppressed peoples and workers around the world to resist capitalist attacks. It would also be likely to weaken several of the regimes that have historically been closely identified with the U.S., including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

After two decades in power, Iran's Islamic Republic appears rather brittle. Every major sporting event or other public occasion threatens to turn into a political demonstration against the rule of the mullahs. This is an important symptom of a developing pre-revolutionary situation. A successful uprising against the Shiite theocrats based on Iran's powerful working class, led by a hard communist organization armed with a consistently revolutionary program, could touch off a wave of socialist struggle in the region, just as Khomeini's victory in 1979 gave impetus to the Islamists.

Ultimately, the cycle of escalating brutality that characterizes imperialist rule will only be ended by eradicating the international system that forces the majority of humanity to live in poverty. This planet can only be cleansed of violence and irrationality through a revolutionary struggle to expropriate the expropriators and create a socialist planned economy on a world scale, in which production is geared to meeting human need, rather than maximizing private profit. Today this may seem a distant goal, but we of the International Bolshevik Tendency believe that not only is it possible, but that there is no other way out for humanity. ■

## Appendix

### Some News that Didn't Fit

*The following was posted on the IBT web site on 18 February 2002.*

One of the outstanding features of the U.S.-led "war" on Afghanistan has been the self-censorship of the capitalist media. In the U.S. in particular, only information that fits the imperialist agenda is reported. Stories about the World Trade Center victims and their loved ones are a daily feature in the American press, while the fact that thousands of Afghan civilians were killed by the retaliatory U.S. terror-bombing is entirely ignored. Most Americans have no idea that the total number of Afghan civilian victims of the "war against terror" vastly exceeds American casualties from the 11 September 2001 attacks.

One story that definitely did not fit the requirements of the imperialist propaganda machine was that of the dockers in

Sasebo, the main port for Japan's Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF), who actively opposed the attack on Afghanistan. On 3 October 2001, the central executive committee of the All Japan Dockworkers' Union passed a motion that read in part:

"As workers in the dock and transport industry, we have opposed cooperation [with the Japanese government in this] war and have fought against the Peace Keeping Operation Law and the Emergency-at-Periphery Law. We seek solidarity with peace-loving people, oppose military retaliation and will fight against the passage of the bill to support U.S. forces and Security Operation Registration."

In late October special "anti-terrorism" legislation was rammed through the Japanese Diet to ease constitutional restrictions on the use of the MSDF to support the U.S. military. Members of the Sasebo branch of the All Japan

Dockworkers' Union held a series of rallies and sit-ins against both the "anti-terrorism" law and Japan's involvement in the attack on Afghanistan. Union members refused to load ammunition and supplies onto MSDF vessels scheduled to resupply U.S. ships in the Indian Ocean. (The supplies were ultimately loaded by members of another union.) On 9 November 2001, the day the ships were to sail, the

Sasebo dockers shut down the port for an hour to hold a protest meeting.

The exemplary actions of these workers, although isolated, limited in scale and tainted by pacifist illusions, provide a valuable reminder to class conscious trade unionists in other countries of the potential for mass labor political strikes to obstruct the bloody plans of the imperialist exploiters. ■

## Document 1.3

### Workers Power's Two-stage 'Trotskyism'

*The following is the text of a leaflet published by the International Bolshevik Tendency (Britain), 5 November 2001*

The front page headline of the October issue of *Workers Power* boldly proclaims: "Defend Afghanistan, Defeat Imperialism, Stop US/UK's War". The LRCI correctly asserts that "From the Afghan side this war is about the defence of the country's sovereignty against the imperialists' grip". Its official pronouncements are unambiguously Afghan defencist:

"In the event of imperialist attack, the LRCI stands clearly for the military victory of all Afghan forces that resist the US/UK offensive. This would include Taliban forces if they resist the imperialist offensive."

—"Defend Afghanistan From Attack;  
Defeat Imperialism", *Workers Power Global Week*,  
4 October

This represents a clear step to the left from the LRCI's scandalous refusal to defend Bosnian Serbs against NATO air strikes in August-September 1995 and its subsequent solidarity with NATO's KLA/UCK auxiliaries during the imperialist attack on Serbia in 1999. Whatever one thinks of Milosevic's regime, it could hardly be considered more reactionary than the misogynist theocracy run by the Taliban.

Yet it seems that the LRCI's defencist position is for propaganda purposes alone—in practice Workers Power has eagerly endorsed the overtly pacifist, class-collaborationist politics of the SWP/CND's "Stop the War Coalition". Thus the LRCI leadership apparently imagines that it can have things both ways—appealing to subjective revolutionaries with a left-wing literary posture without forgoing the "privilege" of participating in the reformist-dominated "mass movement". It rather recalls Kautsky's attitude to the principle of proletarian internationalism—a wonderful thing in the abstract, but not particularly useful in time of war. The unwillingness of the LRCI leadership to actually fight for positions they claim to hold suggests that they have decided that their original defencist position on Afghanistan was a mistake. The other possible explanation is that it was all a cynical charade from the beginning.

The LRCI's adaptationist character shone through in uncritical coverage of the 50,000 person demonstration against the war in London on 13 October (*Workers Power Global Week*, 11 October [sic]):

"This was a great start to the national protest, building on the 2000 that rallied outside Downing St when the bombing started on 7 October. We must build it until Blair is forced to recognise that his unquestioning support for the US led war against Afghanistan does not have the backing of working class people in this country."

Unlike reformists, revolutionaries have no interest in "building" bourgeois pacifist movements, nor are we particularly concerned with getting Blair's attention. Trotskyists have a duty to expose the bogus "revolutionaries" of the SWP

when they organise events where purveyors of pacifist drivel monopolise the platform while anti-imperialist politics (which the SWP ostensibly uphold) are systematically excluded. Half the crowd on 13 October was subjectively anti-imperialist and a substantial section was Afghan defencist. Revolutionaries must seek to organise, develop and give expression to these sentiments and fight to break the blockade on Marxist politics.

The only slogans and ideas that have any substantially progressive content are revolutionary socialist ones, as Lenin pointed out in condemning social-pacifism during World War One:

"A propaganda of peace at the present time, if not accompanied by a call to revolutionary mass actions, is only capable of spreading illusions, of demoralising the proletariat by imbuing it with confidence in the humanitarianism of the bourgeoisie, and of making it a plaything in the hands of the secret diplomacy of the belligerent countries. In particular, the idea of the possibility of a so-called democratic peace without a series of revolutions is deeply erroneous."

—V. I. Lenin, "Conference of the Foreign Sections of the RSDLP", *Social-Democrat* No. 40, 29 March 1915

#### 'Ending the war swiftly'

At the national Stop the War Coalition meeting in London on Sunday 28 October IBT comrades intervened with a flyer proposing that the coalition adopt the following slogans as its basis of unity: "Defend Afghanistan", "Defeat imperialism" and "Stop US/UK's war". Our motion never made it to the floor, and Workers Power representatives did not attempt to put forward any motions of their own. Instead they endorsed the SWP's "broad and inclusive" (i.e., reformist, social-patriotic) approach. The first sentence of the coalition's "Aims and Objectives" states:

"1. The aim of the coalition should be very simple: to stop the war currently declared by the United States and its allies against 'terrorism'."

The problem with this is that the imperialists themselves are anxious to end the war as quickly as possible. The *New York Times* of 31 October reported a division within the imperialist bourgeoisie over how to achieve this:

"In the United States, some seem increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of the military campaign, and conservative politicians have begun to talk about escalating it by using ground forces on a larger scale. In Britain and other European countries, however, public opinion seems headed in the other direction. The European public appears more concerned about civilian casualties than *ending the war swiftly*."

—emphasis added

A section of the US rulers want to "end the war swiftly" by escalating the killing of Afghans. We would like to see a swift

end to the war as well—through a rapid defeat of the imperialists. But we favour the war continuing as long as it takes to defeat the imperialist aggressors. There is no necessary connection between Afghan defencism and demands for “stopping the war”.

The SWP/WP motion continues:

“We condemn the attacks on New York and we feel the greatest compassion for those who lost their life on 11th September.”

We certainly condemn the attack on the World Trade Center and the massacre of the passengers and crew aboard the aeroplanes, but we shed no tears for the military planners in the Pentagon. The SWP’s motion fails to make this elementary class distinction, presumably to avoid offending the sensibilities of the pacifists, liberals and clerics they hope to attract.

The pacifist content of the coalition Workers Power is so anxious to join is explicitly spelled out a bit further along in the motion:

“But any war will simply add to the numbers of innocent dead, cause untold suffering, political and economic instability on a global scale, increase racism and result in attacks on civil liberties.”

Marxists reject the notion that “any war” will have the same outcome. Revolutionaries distinguish between just and unjust wars. We oppose unjust, predatory, imperialist wars, like NATO’s 1999 attack on Yugoslavia or the current US/UK assault on Afghanistan. As Lenin observed, war is a tool of political class struggle. A US/UK victory in this war could help Western oil companies secure control of the vast oil and gas fields of Central Asia. Conversely, a defeat for the imperialist predators would represent a victory for the exploited and oppressed all around the world—including working people in Britain and the US.

### ‘Jam tomorrow’

The LRCI pretends to agree with this. So does the SWP, at least in the abstract. But they both insist that now is not the time to put forward such harsh views. Now is the time to build a “broad” and “inclusive” movement on a bourgeois pacifist programme. The resolution declares:

“We call on all peace activists and organisations, trade unionists, campaigners and labour movement organisations to join with us in building a mass movement that can stop the drive to war.”

The coalition eagerly courts elements like Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn and ARROW who call for UN intervention in Afghanistan. Yet the supposedly anti-imperialist LRCI dares raise no “sectarian” objections. As a reward for good behaviour Workers Power representative Mark H. was granted a seat on the coalition’s steering committee. He will keep this prestigious post just as long as he does not seriously attempt to push any of the left-wing ideas Workers Power purports to champion. The SWP welcomes Workers Power as a toothless left cover for their own reformist activity.

During the 28 October meeting Mark justified Workers Power’s capitulation with the lame assertion that it would not be right to try to “impose” an anti-imperialist, Afghan-defencist position on the mass anti-war movement. He did not explain why, if such views are not worth fighting for

## Appendix

Extract from “Doubletalk in the 2 1/2 Camp,” 1917, No. 10, 3rd quarter 1991

In early 1980 Workers Power publicly renounced the third-campist “Neither Washington nor Moscow” position of Tony Cliff’s Socialist Workers Party (SWP), out of which it

within the movement, Workers Power should want to put them on the cover of its newspaper. Instead he asserted that now is “not the time” for overtly anti-imperialist politics and that the immediate task is to build the broadest possible anti-war movement (on the basis of a reformist programme). This sort of “two-stage” argument has been used for years by Stalinists to rationalise the contradiction between their nominally socialist “maximum” programme and their reformist (i.e., bourgeois) practical activity.

The “broad and inclusive” approach approved by the Sunday meeting was reiterated in the *Guardian* the following day by Gary Younge:

“An anti-imperialist critique certainly informs opposition to this war; but it should not be demanded as a prerequisite for those who wish to see an end to it....

“All alternatives to the current military action must be aired within it and articulated through it. From those who would like to see firmer evidence against Bin Laden before acting, to some who believe only global poverty is the source of the discontent, it must showcase the range of options that have been put forward. Some back a United Nations military intervention under international law; others want to take up the Taliban’s offer of handing Bin Laden over to a third country; many want to put him before an international war crimes court; a few believe only a root-and-branch reform of US foreign policy will work. The anti-war movement should adopt none of these proposals but embrace all of them. It is not its job to be prescriptive about what course of action to take once the bombing has stopped. But to stop the bombing by exposing its futility and inhumanity and the sophistry of those who claim there is no alternative to it.”

### Stating the truth

The Stop the War Coalition is tailored to the requirements of those interested in “demoralising the proletariat by imbuing it with confidence in the humanitarianism of the bourgeoisie”. The job of Leninists is to expose the reformists, combat pacifist illusions and demonstrate why any policy other than Afghan defencism plays into the hands of the imperialists. In voting for the Stop the War Coalition programme and taking a position on its leadership the LRCI assumes responsibility for the “progressive” social-imperialist rhetoric that will inevitably characterise its events.

The disparity between formal posture and practical activity is a hallmark of centrism. LRCI comrades who are serious about the position of *military victory* to Afghanistan against the UK/US attack must reject such adaptations to reformism and fight instead for an explicitly anti-imperialist intervention into the anti-war movement. To do otherwise is to promote illusions in “peaceful” pro-imperialists. For our part, we stand ready to work with any groups or individuals prepared to:

“state what is the truth, not adapt our position to the present consciousness of the majority. We need to use clear, patient language but not give in to the wave of chauvinism or imitate the pacifism that almost inevitably accompanies the onset of war in an imperialist country.”

—“Revolutionaries and the War”, *Workers Power*, No. 257, October

**Defend Afghanistan against US/British attack!  
No pacifist illusions!**

had emerged in the mid-1970s. Rejecting the SWP’s description of the USSR as “state capitalist,” Workers Power announced that it now subscribed to Trotsky’s analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state, and that henceforth it would defend the USSR against capitalist restoration

despite its bureaucratic deformations.

Workers Power's break with its past proved, however, to be only superficial. On all the central questions of international class politics of the last decade, in which the defense of collectivized property was posed, Workers Power couldn't find its way to the proletarian side of the class line.

Workers Power's particular brand of centrist confusion crystallized around its response to the 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. This was for much of the Reagan decade an important dividing line between defensists and those who bent to the pressures of the imperialist war drive against the USSR. Revolutionaries defended the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which bolstered the modernizing regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and prevented the establishment of an American ally on the USSR's southern border. We took a side in this conflict, and called for the military victory of the Soviet army and the PDPA over the tribalist fanatics of the *mujahedin*. Workers Power responded by placing a bet both ways. It denounced the 1979 intervention and said that it was strategically in favor of Soviet withdrawal. However, at the same time, it suspended its call for withdrawal for "tactical" reasons.

The attraction of this double-edged position became clear when, later in the decade, a Soviet withdrawal became immi-

nent. In 1988 Workers Power's Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (the pre-cursor to the LRCI) passed a resolution which, while omitting the need to defend the USSR, continued to "condemn the [1979] invasion as counter-revolutionary" (*Trotskyist International* No. 1, Summer 1988). At the same time, these centrists warned against any "treacherous withdrawal" by the USSR, which would confront "the Afghan left, workers and peasants with the imminent threat of a bloodbath at the hands of the reactionary forces."

Workers Power candidly admitted that the intervention they denounced had prevented just such a bloodbath, in the context of "an escalating civil war [in which] the disparate forces of Islamic and monarchist reaction threatened to completely destroy the weak and faction-ridden PDPA regime." What's more, these sophisticates of confusion demanded that the Soviet armed forces "provide the necessary troops, ammunition and economic aid to make land reform, industrialisation, literacy and the defeat of reaction really possible." In other words, they called for the extension of an intervention which they condemned as "counter-revolutionary"! Workers Power replaces Trotskyist analysis with simply damning the Stalinists if they do and damning them if they don't. ■

## Document 1.4

### *The Politics of Chicken Revisited* Where Is the ICL Going?

*The following statement by the International Bolshevik Tendency, published on 2 December 2001, was reprinted in 1917 No. 24, 2002.*

Over the past several weeks we have been asked what the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) makes of *Workers Vanguard's* recent flurry of (sometimes overlapping) polemics against ourselves and the Internationalist Group (IG) concerning the U.S.-led attack on Afghanistan. Many leftists have been puzzled by the Spartacist League's (SL) open and unprecedented rejection of the call for "defeat" of its own imperialist ruling class. This position clearly represents another step in the political degeneration of this formerly Trotskyist organization.

The first polemic in the SL's current campaign, aimed at the IBT, was occasioned by our observation that *Workers Vanguard* (WV), like virtually all of the fake-left, had failed to make any distinction between the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in its treatment of the 11 September attacks. In our 18 September statement, we had tweaked the Spartacist League (leading section of the International Communist League [ICL]) by recalling its social-patriotic response to the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marines' compound in Lebanon:

"Marxists oppose terrorism as a strategy for the liberation of the oppressed because, even in the best case, it substitutes the acts of a tiny handful for the conscious activity of the working class. But revolutionary Marxists differentiate between acts aimed at imperialist military targets and those aimed at innocent civilians. For example, we recognize that the demolition of the U.S. and French garrisons in Lebanon in 1983 by 'Islamic Jihad' were defensible blows against imperialist attempts to establish a military beachhead in the Middle East. Some supposed Marxist organizations flinched, including the left-posturing Spartacist League/U.S., which issued a social-patriotic call for saving the sur-

viving U.S. Marines."

We took the view in 1983 that the central issue was the Marines leaving Lebanon—and we did not much care if they walked out or were carried out in body bags. We feel the same way about the "coalition" forces in Afghanistan today. In contrast, the SL specified that it wanted the Marines out "alive." This represented a significant difference, which is documented in our Trotskyist Bulletin No. 2.

While we picked up the SL's apparent dive on the Pentagon, the IG, in a statement dated 27 September, raised another criticism:

"Nowhere does the [12 September] SL statement call to defend the countries (notably Afghanistan and Iraq) which were already targeted by Washington in the first hours after the WTC/Pentagon attack."

This stung the SL, which indignantly replied:

"Indeed, as soon as the U.S. imperialists started raining down bombs on Afghanistan, we raised the call to 'Defend Afghanistan against imperialist attack!' not only on our front page but also on our banners and signs at demonstrations and in our interventions at 'antiwar' meetings."

—WV, 26 October

The IG responded that one hardly needed to wait until the bombs started falling to call for Afghanistan's defense. But the IG was stretching it to make this criticism in the first place, as the SL's 12 September statement made clear their "opposition to the war aims and military adventures of the American rulers abroad" and included among its demands "U.S. imperialism hands off the world!"

### SL & the Democrats

A more substantial criticism was raised by the IG in its 25 October statement:

"Workers Vanguard joined the WWP and CPUSA [Workers World Party and Communist Party-USA] in praising black Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee of Oakland, saying that 'to her credit' she was the only Representative to vote against 'giving Bush a blank check for war.' Not only does WV not make a single criticism of Lee, it doesn't mention that even as she voted against the 'use of force' resolution, the Congresswoman voted for the \$40 billion emergency war credits bill that included a blank check for the CIA!"

In the 26 October WV, the SL sniffed that it is "not indifferent" to "cracks in the bourgeois edifice." Fair enough, Leninists should not be indifferent to such things, but neither should they give the left wing of the twin parties of racism and imperialist war a free pass. The 9 November issue of WV finally introduced an orthodox caveat into its previously uncritical treatment of Lee:

"The black Democrats and oppositional trade-union tops are positioning themselves to get ahead of and contain the increasing discontents that the capitalist rulers' war at home and abroad, coming amid a deepening recession and the enduring character of racist oppression, will generate among working people and minorities. Selling themselves as the friends of labor and blacks is the longstanding card played by the Democrats, which is why they are historically the preferred party of the bourgeoisie when it comes to mobilizing the population for war."

—WV, 9 November

The friendly treatment of Barbara Lee is not the first time the Spartacist League has exhibited softness on the Democrats. In 1984, the SL offered to send a dozen defense guards to the Democratic National Convention to protect them against "Reagan reaction" and the entirely imaginary danger of "ultrarightist assault against...the Convention itself." *Workers Vanguard* absurdly claimed that:

"a fitting historical model for Reagan's exploitation of a 'terror scare' to smash political opposition can be found in the 1933 Reichstag...fire, which was...exploited by [the Nazis] to repress political dissidence and consolidate the Third Reich."

—WV No. 358, 6 July 1984

The SL's offer to defend the Democrats against "the real instigators and perpetrators of political disruption and violence, against the Watergaters [i.e., Republicans] and Cold Warriors" echoed the "unite to stop the right" popular-frontist rhetoric of the Communist Party. In an 11 July 1984 letter, the External Tendency of the iSt (forerunner of the IBT) commented:

"The real instigators and perpetrators of political disruption and violence' are just as much a part of the Democratic party as the Republican. (Ever heard of [Democrat and arch-segregationist] Lester Maddox? What about [Ku Klux Klan leader and Democrat Party member] Tom Metzger!) 'Not a dime's worth of difference,' remember?"

—reprinted in *ET Bulletin* No. 4, May 1985

In the 1960s and 70s the SL often used the expression that, from the standpoint of the working class, there is "not a dime's worth of difference" between the Republican and Democratic parties. In its 31 August 1984 issue, WV explicitly repudiated this, and wrote: "Anyone but a blind man can see there is more than a 'dime's worth of difference' between Mondale and Reagan...."

### 'Duck and Cover': SL Abandons Defeatism

In addition to chastising the SL for its softness on the Democrats and for its tardiness in explicitly calling for the defense of Afghanistan and Iraq, the IG's 27 September statement leveled a third criticism, one which we initially regarded as overreaching: "For that matter, it [the SL] doesn't even call to defeat

the mounting war drive, only to 'oppose' it." We had noticed that the initial statement from the SL Political Bureau proudly recalled how:

"in the face of the U.S.-led NATO onslaught against Serbia two years ago, which destroyed the entire infrastructure of that country, we raised the banner: 'Defeat U.S. imperialism through workers revolution! Defend Serbia!'"

—WV, 14 September

We therefore considered it quibbling to interpret the SL's statement that it "opposed" this latest imperialist military aggression as some sort of rejection of a call to "defeat" it.

We were caught by surprise when, instead of brusquely dismissing the IG's criticism, the SL replied:

"From a Marxist perspective, however, there is no way to 'defeat' the inevitable drive toward war by the capitalists short of their being expelled from power through victorious workers revolution...."

—WV, 26 October

This showed that the IG was on to something. The inherent historical tendency for capitalist competition to lead to war cannot be eradicated, but particular imperialist campaigns *can* be aborted through determined popular resistance—i.e., class struggle. The SL's dismissal of the *possibility* of "defeating" a particular war drive short of socialist revolution is of a piece with its maximalist objections to calling for a "general strike" unless a mass revolutionary party is already in place to lead it. By counterposing "building the revolutionary party" to calling for a generalized, working-class response to a generalized attack by the bosses, the SL engages in the sort of "scholastic passivity" it vehemently denounced a quarter of a century ago when it was still a revolutionary organization. (see: 1917 No. 20 "In Defense of Tactics") The SL's current counterposition of a hypothetical "workers revolution" to the necessity to stand clearly for the defeat of their own imperialist rulers is cut from the same cloth.

The IG reports:

"We have learned that the ICL had an internal discussion on slogans in which it decided not to call to defeat imperialism in the war. This was no doubt at least partly in response to our special issue of *The Internationalist* (27 September) prominently headlined 'Defeat the U.S./NATO War Drive!'"

—*The Internationalist*, Fall 2001

We suspect the ICL leaders were motivated by something other than a desire to distinguish themselves from the IG. Several times in the past, the SL has exhibited a cowardly reflex in situations where it feared incurring the displeasure of its own ruling class.

The first instance was the call to save the Marines in Lebanon. A few years later, in January 1986, when the destruction of the space shuttle *Challenger* aborted a top-secret military mission, WV, taking its cue from the tearful accounts in the bourgeois media, volunteered:

"What we feel toward the astronauts is no more and no less than for any people who die in tragic circumstances such as the nine poor Salvadorans who were killed by a fire in a Washington, D.C. basement apartment two days before."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 14 February 1986

As we pointed out at the time, revolutionaries feel a great deal more sympathy for impoverished refugees from a right-wing terrorist regime than for the professional military cadres of imperialism. (see: 1917 No. 2, "Challenger: No Disaster for the Working Class") For reasons of personal prestige and organizational equilibrium (see: 1917 No. 20, "Willful Blindness"), the IG stands by the SL's earlier flinches, but it is pulling no punches this time:

"The real explanation for their [the SL's] line is 'duck and cover,' and its political content is *economist social pacifism*."

—*op cit*.

The IG cites Lenin in “Socialism and War”:

“A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, and cannot fail to see that the latter’s military reverses must facilitate its overthrow; and in a war of Morocco against France, or of India against Britain, ‘any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory “Great” Powers.’”

—*Ibid.*

The essential issue posed for the left by the attack on Afghanistan is which side to take—should we favor the victory or the defeat of our rulers? Two years ago, when NATO bombs began to fall on Belgrade, the SL answered that question clearly: “*Defend Serbia! Defeat U.S./NATO imperialism! For workers revolution!*” (WV, 16 April 1999). Why should its answer be different today?

### Tactics & Propaganda Groups

The SL leadership is attempting to cover its retreat from openly calling for the defeat of imperialism in Afghanistan by pretending that it is all just a matter of tactics.

“At bottom, the IG deliberately muddles the question of a military defeat in a particular war with the proletarian defeat of one’s bourgeoisie through socialist revolution. The latter is the program animating any truly revolutionary party in peacetime as in wartime. The slogans used to proceed toward that end—to lead the working masses from their current level of consciousness to the seizure of state power—are, however, necessarily conjunctural.”

—WV, 9 November

This is followed by a discussion of Bolshevik tactics in the months preceding the struggle for power in October 1917. The slogans necessary to mobilize the masses for power are indeed “conjunctural,” but for the foreseeable future the SL, as a very small propaganda group (albeit larger than the IBT or IG), is not likely to be confronted with the problem of directing the seizure of power. No left group in the U.S. (or in most other imperialist countries) is currently able to directly influence millions, or even thousands, of working people. It is simply comical to suggest that by dropping the call for the defeat of this imperialist adventure the SL somehow advances a step closer to making a bid for state power.

Then there is the absurdity of calling for the *defense* of Afghanistan while refusing to call for the *defeat* of the U.S. and its allies. One can be defeatist on both sides in a conflict, but to be “defensist” on one side, one must necessarily be “defeatist” on the other.

### From Ethiopia to Afghanistan: Defeat Imperialist Aggression!

The IG pointed to the impact of Algeria’s long war of independence on the political climate of France.

“The French defeat at the hands of the Algerian independence fighters culminating in 1962 demoralized the French bourgeoisie and helped lead to the worker-student revolt of 1968, which posed the first potentially revolutionary crisis in Europe in years.”

—*The Internationalist*, Fall 2001

WV replied: “In reality, the eight-year-long colonial war in Algeria bears no resemblance to what is happening in Afghanistan today.” What the two situations have in common is that both involve a struggle between imperialists and the oppressed. In such cases revolutionaries favor the defeat of the imperialists. The SL introduces another analogy: Mussolini’s 1935 invasion of Ethiopia:

“In calling on the working class to defend Afghanistan against U.S. imperialism, we apply the same Leninist princi-

ple of siding with backward countries against imperialist attack. That said, the U.S. war against Afghanistan is in important ways different from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, which was aimed at realizing Italy’s longstanding intention to colonize that country. The U.S. does not aim at an occupation of Afghanistan—at least not at this point—although now that they’re in Central Asia the imperialists will grab what they can. In attacking Afghanistan, the U.S. seeks vengeance for the insult to its imperial might.”

The question of whether the U.S. intends to occupy some or all of Afghanistan or its neighbors, or how long it intends to remain, or what military tactics it intends to employ, does not change the fact that revolutionaries want to see the imperialist aggressors *defeated*. WV’s assertion that it is “spurious” to make an analogy between colonial wars and neo-colonial ones is entirely illegitimate:

“The IG’s spurious analogy with colonial wars notwithstanding, it seems currently unlikely that the U.S. will launch a significant land invasion of Afghanistan....

“Washington’s most likely variant at this time is for continued, incessant and purposeless bombing for which the Taliban has no possible military redress. Again, this was not the case in the 1935 Italo-Ethiopian war. Italy was a second-rate imperialist power riven by sharp class contradictions and constrained in its intentions by its bigger imperialist rivals. Although in the upshot Italy was victorious after a seven-month-long ground war, it was not unreasonable for the then-Trotskyist U.S. Socialist Workers Party to project a possible military victory by Ethiopia.”

Instead of a clear and forthright statement of their new revisionist position, the WV scribes employ hints and innuendo, leaving their readers to work it out for themselves. But the implication is clear: in Ethiopia in the 1930s, unlike in Afghanistan today, it was “reasonable” to call for the military defeat of the imperialist aggressor, but today the U.S.-led coalition is so strong that it is “unreasonable” to imagine its defeat. Therefore, the SL suggests, it would be a mistake to advocate a defeatist position. This is the logic that leads down the path to “the left wing of the possible.”

WV quotes the Trotskyists of 1935 on the potential impact of an Italian defeat in Ethiopia:

“The whole European system of alliances and states would fall apart. The proletariat in Germany, Austria, Spain, on the Balkans, and not least of all in France, would receive an enormous impulsion; the face of Europe would be altered. That lies in the direct class interests of the international proletariat. But still more. A defeat of Italy in Africa, a victory of Ethiopia, might deliver the imperialist bandits a terrific blow in Africa.”

—“Questions of the Italo-Ethiopian War,”  
*New Internationalist*, October 1935

But, according to the Spartacist League:

“None of these factors currently constrain the U.S., although, to be sure, the war will exacerbate tensions among the imperialist powers, and its price in misery at home may awaken class combativity in the American proletariat.”

—WV, 9 November

In fact, many of the projections made by the *New Internationalist* in 1935 are entirely applicable to the current situation. A defeat for the U.S.-led coalition would, as the SL admits, sharpen “tensions among the imperialist powers” while undermining their ability to attack their own workers. The awakening of “class combativity in the American proletariat” could itself be a factor of inestimable importance in world politics. A setback in Afghanistan would certainly also “deliver the imperialist bandits a terrific blow” in the strategically vital Middle East, and potentially destabilize the regimes most closely identified with the U.S., including Egypt, Saudi

Arabia and Pakistan.

Hindsight is of course 20/20. During the same week the WV article was published, we were holding public meetings in Toronto where we speculated that the Taliban might be dug in well enough to survive a prolonged U.S. bombardment. As things turned out, the U.S. aerial attack proved more successful than either we or the SL had anticipated.

If the imperialist coalition is compelled to deploy significant numbers of ground troops to finish off the Taliban and its allies in its Pashtun base area, it seems conceivable that the Islamist guerrillas could prolong the conflict long enough, and inflict enough casualties on the U.S. forces, to dampen domestic support for the campaign. This would be a “best case” outcome, and at this point it cannot be entirely excluded.

In 1927, Leon Trotsky, the great Russian revolutionary, provided a description of how fake-revolutionary organizations act under the pressure of bourgeois war hysteria, one that accurately captures the ICL’s recent behavior:

“Opportunism, or radicalism that is turning to opportunism, always inclines to estimate war as such as an *exceptional* phenomenon that it requires the annulment of revolutionary policy and its basic principles. Centrism reconciles itself to revolutionary methods but does not believe in them. That is why it is always inclined, at critical moments, to refer to the *peculiarity* of the situation, to *exceptional* circumstances, and so on, in order to substitute opportunist methods for revolutionary ones. Such a shift in the policy of centrism or pseudo-radicalism is of course acutely provoked by the war danger.”

—“The Struggle for Peace and the Anglo-Russian Committee,” 16 May 1927

The responsibility of revolutionaries is to put forward the political program necessary to advance the class struggle. And the necessary and appropriate response for class-conscious workers in every country in the imperialist coalition can only be to work for the defeat of their own rulers. A class-struggle leadership of the workers’ movement prepared to actively resist the predatory campaigns of its rulers could be an important factor in bringing about an imperialist defeat. Upholding this, the only revolutionary perspective, is the responsibility of the Trotskyist vanguard.

In Iran, which borders Afghanistan, the mullahs’ grip is weakening. There have been reports of spontaneous popular protests against the regime erupting at sporting events. This is usually a symptom of a developing pre-revolutionary situation. Imperialist aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq or other Muslim countries could contribute to the outbreak of explosive social struggles and create fertile conditions for the rapid growth of revolutionary organizations in the region.

## Appendix No. 1

### *The Fire Last Time...*

#### ICL: ‘Save Our Boys’ Socialists

The following statement was published by the IBT as an appendix to “Where is the ICL Going?” and reprinted in 1917 No. 24, 2002.

One of the reasons that the 1983 call to save the Marines presents such a problem for the SL is that it flatly contradicted both the historical tradition it claims to stand on, and the image it likes to cultivate as a fearlessly revolutionary organization. In 1982, during the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, WV ran an article sneeringly entitled “‘Save Our Boys’ Socialists” which excoriated Sean Matgamna’s *Socialist Organiser* for running a sympathetic interview with Reg Race, a Labour Party “left”:

“Never has Lenin’s characterization of social democrats as

But the demoralized centrists leading the SL see none of this. Their pessimism is only thinly disguised by bombastic talk of “mobilizing” the American working class:

“Thus, the call for a U.S. military defeat is, at this time, illusory and the purest hot air and ‘revolutionary’ phrasemongering—and one which derives from forsaking the mobilization of the U.S. proletariat with the aim of the conquest of state power.

“Unlike the IG, the SL is committed to breaking the American working class and the oppressed from their class-collaborationist bondage to the Democratic Party and to forging a revolutionary workers party to overthrow American imperialism through socialist revolution. While the IG waxes oh-so-revolutionary in the ether of cyberspace, we actually fight for a proletarian, revolutionary, internationalist perspective on the ground.”

—WV, 9 November

The SL’s “on the ground” activity amounted to reading a prepared statement to a crowd of 50 people at a public forum in the longshore hall in San Francisco on 10 October. The SL statement included a call for “a political struggle within the unions to forge a revolutionary workers party....” A fine sentiment, but unfortunately more distant today than it was before the once-revolutionary Spartacist League liquidated its trade-union work almost 20 years ago in the course of its political degeneration.

In the late 1970s, SL-supported caucuses were nationally recognized as the opposition to the pro-capitalist bureaucracy in both the Communications Workers of America and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. SL supporters also had an important toehold in the United Auto Workers. Since this work was ripped up, the SL has had no influence or real roots in any sector of the American working class. The External Tendency of the iSt, the IBT’s predecessor, opposed the SL’s turn away from union work at the time (see “Declaration of an external tendency of the iSt,” 15 October 1982, “Stop the Liquidation of the Trade Union Work!” 25 June 1983 and “Decline of SL-supported Trade Union Work,” *ET Bulletin* No. 3, May 1984).

WV’s distinction between the IG “wax[ing] oh-so-revolutionary” on the internet and an SL supporter doing so at a public meeting is ludicrous. A serious “fight for a proletarian, revolutionary, internationalist perspective on the ground” requires more than the odd speech and a few articles. Such a struggle must begin with a correct programmatic orientation. In this regard, a critical distinction must be made between those who take a defeatist position toward their own imperialist rulers, and professional confusionists who advocate the “defense” of the oppressed, but shrink from calling for the “defeat” of their oppressors. ■

‘social imperialists’ been more fitting. Race calls for withdrawing the fleet and *sparing the precious blood of Britain’s elite forces* because he has another program to bring Argentina to its knees....”

—WV No. 306, 28 May 1982, emphasis added

Even after WV revealed that “sparing the precious blood” of the U.S. Marines had somehow suddenly become an important Leninist tactic the same criterion was not applied in Britain. The December 1983/January 1984 issue of *Spartacist Britain* published an auto-critique by A. Gilchrist, a senior cadre of the SL’s British group, in which he confessed:

“The position of ‘Withdraw the Fleet’ was a position of *defending* the imperialist armed forces from destruction by *another anti-Soviet military*. The Falklands war tested every

tendency on the British left in the clearest way, because war is the period of greatest nationalist pressures. This Bennite [left Labourite] position was a clear capitulation to the 'socialist' chauvinism of the Labour Party...."

—emphasis in original

In the 9 November issue of *WV*, the SL attempts to get out from under its "Marines Alive" position by claiming that, "to this day it is still not clear who blew up the Marine barracks." The truth is that it is pretty clear to everyone except the SL (and, presumably, the IG). For example, in the Spring 1993 issue of *Foreign Policy*, the editor, Charles W. Maynes, wrote the following:

"The United States, in the hubris of the Reagan administration, forgot the fundamental nature of peacekeeping. It deployed U.S. Marines in Lebanon without understanding that it was essential for their safety that the United States not take sides in the Lebanese civil war. The Reagan administration decided to back the Christians and soon found its troops under attack by the Muslims and finally driven from Lebanon after the disastrous bombing of the marine bar-

racks in Beirut."

Every serious observer of the Middle East agrees that the suicide truck-bombing of the Marine barracks, carried out by a group calling itself "Islamic Jihad," was a response to U.S. military intervention on the side of the Christian Phalange. The *New York Times* blames Hezbollah, the Lebanese "Party of God," for the attack:

"In recent years the Islamic group has grafted a new image as an above-ground political force onto its 1980's past. Back then, Hezbollah, or groups to which it was closely linked, was notorious for brutal terrorist operations, including destroying the American Embassy in Beirut in 1983 and killing 241 Americans at a Marine compound later the same year."

—*New York Times*, 14 February 2001

If another truck bomb were to go off this week outside the Marine encampment near Kandahar, would the SL try to hide behind the pretence that the precise identity of the perpetrators was unknown? We rather doubt it. ■

## Appendix No. 2

### ICL on Afghanistan: Healyites of the Second Mobilization?

*The following is a reconstruction, from notes, of the intervention of International Bolshevik Tendency [IBT] supporter Samuel T. at a Spartacist League (SL) forum in New York City on 9 February 2002. Our comrade pointed to the parallel between the SL's refusal to call for the defeat of the U.S. imperialist attack on Afghanistan in 2001 and the position adopted by David North's Workers League a decade earlier when Iraq was under attack. The SLers at the forum were unable to respond politically.*

I am speaking on behalf of the International Bolshevik Tendency. Now, most comrades in this room have been following the polemical exchanges between us, the Internationalist Group and the SL in relation to the SL's recent abandonment of revolutionary defeatism over Afghanistan—that is, their refusal to call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. To many younger comrades, the SL's arguments in defense of this new line may sound new and original, but they don't sound very new or original to me.

During the period of the Gulf War, I was a teenage member of David North's Workers League [WL—today the Socialist Equality Party]. At that time the Northites also decided to drop the call for defeating U.S. imperialism [the WL had initially called for defeating the U.S. before the outbreak of hostilities, but jettisoned the slogan when the attack began]. I would like to read some quotes from their book where they defend their position [against criticism from other fragments of Gerry Healy's former "International Committee"]:

"Revolutionary defeatism is neither an agitational slogan nor a special tactic for engineering the military defeat of one's 'own' bourgeoisie, but the continuation in time of war from the perspective for which the revolutionary party fights under all conditions....

"Both Pottins and Athow reject this perspective. They substitute for the mobilization of the working class the actions of other class forces – in the case of Pottins and [Cliff] Slaughter, the middle class protest movement; in the case of [Sheila] Torrance and Athow, the bourgeois regime of Saddam Hussein.

"Athow's rhetoric about the prospects for an Iraqi military victory was criminally irresponsible. An outright military defeat of the US-dominated coalition was not merely un-

likely, but virtually impossible, given that Iraq, a nation of 17 million people, was isolated and blockaded, while facing a coalition of all the major imperialist countries, equipped with unchallenged air power and a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons. So long as the struggle remained a purely military one, its ultimate outcome could not be in doubt. Only the intervention of the working class in the United States and internationally could have prevented the shattering defeat of Iraq which took place between January 16 and February 28."

—*Desert Slaughter: The Imperialist War Against Iraq*, Labor Publications, 1991, pp370-72]

[David North responded in a similar vein to criticism from the SL and the Revolutionary Workers League:]

"Revolutionary defeatism is not any sort of radical phrasemongering. It is not running around shouting in a bankrupt, empty and really meaningless way for the military defeat of American imperialism. We don't entrust to others the task which only the working class, armed with a revolutionary leadership, can achieve. That is, our conception of revolutionary defeatism is not fighting to the last Iraqi. It's not standing as cheerleaders for the military forces of Saddam Hussein."

—*Ibid.*, p474

These arguments will of course have a very familiar ring to readers of *Workers Vanguard* of the last few months.

Comrades in this room who were around in the 1960's can probably also remember many similarly orthodox-sounding arguments used by the Socialist Workers Party as a cover against calling for the military victory of the NLF [National Liberation Front] in Vietnam. In using these sorts of arguments, the SL is following in the footsteps of a long line of other organizations in their flight from Marxism.

A decade ago, the SL recruited me from the Workers League by thoroughly convincing me that all these "arguments" were in reality rationalizations for betrayals and "alien appetites." A decade later, the SL is using essentially the same rationalizations for its own betrayals.

As a last point, many younger comrades may be confused by the fact that the SL claims to oppose raising the call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism, while simultaneously vigorously maintaining they have not abandoned revolutionary defeatism, because at least they defend Afghanistan [just as the Northites claimed to be Iraqi defencists in 1991]. Of course, the SL has a precedent for this kind of deliberate confusionism.

During the destruction of the Soviet Union, the SL refused to support either the Stalinist coupists or the Yeltsinites militarily [the IBT gave military support to the Stalinists against the

Yeltsinites] while all the while insisting that they were not neutral in the conflict. If comrades feel confused by such positions it is because that is their purpose. ■

## Appendix No. 3

### ICL on Afghanistan: 'Realist' Wiseacres

*The following is a reconstruction, from notes, of an intervention by International Bolshevik Tendency [IBT] supporter Samuel T. at a meeting of the Spartacus Youth Club (SYC—youth group of the Spartacist League [SL]) in New York City on 12 February 2002. Once again the Spartacists were unable to respond politically.*

The SYC comrade mentioned that his organization defends Afghanistan without discussing why they don't call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. What does it mean to defend Afghanistan without calling for the defeat of U.S. imperialism—that one “defends” Afghanistan only to the extent of seeking to limit the damage inflicted upon it? Since the SL claims not to call for a U.S. defeat because the struggle for the Afghans would be militarily futile, that's the only possible conclusion I can see.

If we accept the assumption that the SL makes about the military futility of any struggle by the Afghans, what does the SL suggest they do? Show no resistance? Allow the U.S. to completely take over their country?

Marx believed that the workers who launched the Paris Commune were doomed to defeat from a purely military standpoint, yet he still supported them and called for their victory.

In the current issue of 1917 we cite Lenin's comments in “Socialism and War”:

“A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, and cannot fail to see that the latter's military reverses must facilitate its overthrow”; and in a war of Morocco against France, or of India against Britain, “any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and *unequal* states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory “Great” Powers.” [emphasis added]

Lenin called for the defeat of imperialism in colonies as undeveloped as Afghanistan is today. The struggle between imperialism and the Third World was *always* unequal, but only the most wretched Kautskyites use that as an excuse to abstain from a revolutionary defeatist position by counterposing “class struggle at home.”<sup>2</sup> In raising the issue in these terms, the SL is simply attempting a cowardly dodge. Whether forced to pull out by resistance from the Afghans, the U.S. working class, or as a result of class struggle in other parts of the world, a defeat is a defeat.

As for how, theoretically, the “ragtag fundamentalists” could have driven out the U.S. “without even an army”—well, “Islamic Jihad” drove the U.S. out of Lebanon by blowing up the Marines' barracks in 1983. Of course in that case the SL flinched and denied that it was a militarily supportable blow against imperialism.

Lastly, I'd like to report an interesting conversation I had with a friend today, who, back in high school, was also a member of the Northites' youth group [the Young Socialists—affiliated with David North's Workers League, now known as the Socialist Equality Party]. When I left the Northites over their refusal to call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism during the Gulf War, she and another youth member left with me. Unfortunately both were too burned by their experience with North's version of Healyism to want to continue in politics,

but they subscribed to *Workers Vanguard* for a few years after I joined the SYC. Not having followed the SL for several years, she reviewed the new position on Afghanistan and, remembering the position on defeating U.S. imperialism at the time she left the Northites, commented “Wow, it seems like the SL really had its back broken.”

### Notes

1. Lenin in 1907 wrote the following:

“In September 1870, six months before the Commune, Marx gave a direct warning to the French workers: insurrection would be an *act of desperate folly*, he said in the well-known Address of the International. He exposed in *advance* the nationalistic illusions of the possibility of a movement in the spirit of 1792. He was able to say, *not after the event*, but many months before: ‘Don't take up arms.’ “And how did he behave when this *hopeless* cause, as he himself had called it in September, began to take practical shape in March 1871?... Did he begin to scold like a schoolmistress, and say: ‘I told you so, I warned you; this is what comes of your romanticism, your revolutionary ravings’? Did he preach to the Communards, as Plekhanov did to the December [1905] fighters, the sermon of the smug philistine: ‘You should not have taken up arms’?”

“Ah, how our present ‘realist’ wiseacres among the Marxists, who in 1906-07 are deriding revolutionary romanticism in Russia, would have sneered at Marx at the time! How people would have scoffed at a *materialist*, an *economist*, an enemy of utopias, who pays homage to an ‘attempt’ to storm *heaven!* What tears, condescending smiles or commiseration these ‘men in mufflers’ would have bestowed upon him for his rebel tendencies, utopianism, etc., etc....

“Kugelmann apparently replied to Marx expressing certain doubts, referring to the hopelessness of the struggle and to realism as opposed to romanticism....

“Marx immediately (April 17, 1871) severely lectured Kugelmann.

“‘*World history*,’ he wrote, ‘*would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances.*’”

“Marx was also able to appreciate that there are moments in history when a desperate struggle of the *masses*, even for a hopeless cause is *essential* for the further schooling of these masses and their training for the *next* struggle.”

—“Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx's Letters to Dr. Kugelmann,” *Collected Works* Vol. 12, pp. 108-112

2. Lenin had nothing but contempt for the self-proclaimed socialists who derided the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin as a “putsch” doomed to fail because of the overwhelming strength of British imperialism. He commented:

“The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene.”

—“The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up” (1916), *Collected Works* Vol. 22, p. 357 ■

## Document 1.5

### *Class War—Not Holy War!*

## Islam, Empire and Revolution

Reprinted from 1917 No. 17, 1996

In April 1991 Sudan's fundamentalist regime hosted an international Islamist conference in Khartoum. Chaired by Hassan al-Turabi, Sudan's clerical ruler, delegates from 55 nations, representing millions of supporters, approved a six-point manifesto calling for pan-Islamic unity and the adoption of the *sharia* (Islamic law) as the basis of government in every Muslim country. The Afghan *mujahedin* (then on the brink of overthrowing the left-nationalist People's Democratic Party regime) were represented by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who first gained notoriety in the 1970s for throwing acid in the faces of unveiled women at Kabul University. Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), represented by Abassi Madani, had just bested the ruling party in municipal elections. Throughout the Muslim world, Islamists were making inroads among students, young intellectuals and discontented plebeian masses.

Since 1991, the Islamists have suffered some setbacks. In Algeria the "moderate" elements in the FIS are seeking an accommodation with the military rulers who have spent the past four years trying to crush them, while in Afghanistan, rival Islamic factions battle each other for supremacy, as the country slides into chaos. Sixteen years after taking power, Iran's Islamic Republic inspires more cynicism than fervor. Yet Muslim fundamentalism retains a mass following throughout much of the Middle East, and today the specter of militant Islam is acknowledged by the world powers as itself a world power.

Yet Islamic fundamentalism is far from being a unified world movement. Some groups seek accommodation with regimes willing to assume Islamic trappings; others are more intransigent toward the "internal infidel." Different groups employ various combinations of parliamentary, terrorist and mass insurrectionary tactics. Despite occasional ecumenical declarations, the enduring sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites remains. The most powerful Islamist state, Iran, is Shiite, and therefore viewed as somewhat heretical by the 85 percent of Muslims who are Sunni. Many Sunni Islamists, including Turabi, who is now a proponent of ecumenism, supported Iraq in its war with Iran in the 1980s.

Orthodox Muslims believe that the Quran is the word of God, dictated to the Prophet Muhammad, which can only be interpreted in conjunction with the *hadiths* (the sayings and actions of the Prophet and whichever other early Muslim leaders the particular sect venerates). Liberal Muslims, employing modernist interpretations, argue that Islamic doctrine is compatible with democracy, socialism and women's rights. Conservative fundamentalists are hostile to Islamic "modernism," but, unlike the radicals, they generally preach obedience to political authority. In Sunni countries, the *ulama* (religious scholars) are paid employees of the state, and can therefore be relied upon to interpret Islam's political message to suit the rulers of the day.

### Tenets of Radical Islamism

Radical Islamists reject both liberal modernism and conservative quietism. The radicals view most of the states in the Middle East as pseudo-Islamic. They define the enemy as creeping secularization and consumerism, which they associ-

ate with both the growth of the market and class struggle. In their view, pro-Western, free-market regimes are as guilty of promoting these trends as the Ba'athist "socialist" regimes in Syria and Iraq or the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria. The Islamists preach an internal *jihad* to establish truly Islamic regimes as a prerequisite for a successful external *jihad*.

While the modernists argue that Islam is inherently democratic because of its institution of *shura* (consultation), the radicals assert that *shura* only involves consultation with religious scholars for the proper interpretation of the *sharia*. In *Islamic Government* Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wrote:

"The Islamic government is not despotic but constitutional. However, it is not constitutional in the well-known sense of the word, which is represented in the parliamentary system or in the people's councils.... The difference between the Islamic government and the constitutional governments, both monarchic and republican, lies in the fact that the people's representatives or the king's representatives are the ones who codify and legislate, whereas the power of legislation is confined to God, may He be praised, and nobody else has the right to legislate...."

Islamist militants combine denunciations of Western imperialism and the conspicuous consumption of the rich with reverence for private property and "Islamic economics." They are uniformly hostile to all forms of socialist and pro-working class ideology. Khomeini crushed the Iranian left soon after they aided his ascension to power and Turabi's regime decimated the Sudanese Communist Party, once one of Africa's largest. Sayyid Qutb, the preeminent ideologue of Sunni fundamentalism, often denounced "plutocracy" and western capitalism, but was opposed to the very idea of social equality:

"Muhammad could have certainly hoisted a social banner, launched a war upon the privileged and the high-born. He could have set Islam up as a movement aspiring to social change and redistribution of assets of the rich unto the poor.... Yet Allah, in his eternal wisdom, did not instruct the Prophet to take this course.... He made him launch only one rallying cry: 'There is no God but Allah!'"

—quoted in Emanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*

Radical Islamists are also distinguished by their virulent commitment to the subordination of women. Qutb referred to the idea of women's liberation as a "sewer." The tiniest social space for women's freedom from male authority is denounced as *jahiliyya* (barbarism). From Algeria to Bangladesh, Islamists have attacked women who fail to abide by the reactionary social code of the mullahs.

Modernist interpretations of Islam downplay texts like the 34th verse of the Fourth Surah in the Quran:

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge [other translations say 'beat'] them."

—*The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, trans. by Muhammad Pickthall

Unlike the modernists, Islamic radicals unabashedly emphasize the incompatibility of Islam and equality for women.

One of the first laws enacted by the Iranian parliament, after Shah Reza Pahlavi was deposed, was the Islamic Dress Law, which imposes a penalty of one year in prison for any woman not wearing the *hijab* (a headdress traditionally worn by unmarried Muslim women). Executions for adultery and homosexuality are common under the *sharia*.

Radical Islamists are also intensely anti-Semitic and generally intolerant of other religions. The Iranian regime initiated campaigns to wipe out the tiny Bahai and Zoroastrian minorities. The Egyptian fundamentalists have organized riots against the Christian Copts, whom they term the “crusaders.” When Turabi’s Sudanese regime took power through a military coup in 1989, one of its first acts was to declare a *jihad* against the black population in the south who are mainly Christians or animists. According to *Middle East Report* (November-December 1992):

“Many interpret this [declaration of *jihad*] to mean that land, cattle and women in conquered areas can be claimed by the conquerors. One influential woman leader in the Islamist movement suggested that a solution to the ‘southern problem’ was for Muslim men to take non-Muslim Dinka women as second wives or concubines, assuming their children would be raised as Muslims.”

### Social Roots of Radical Islamism

The phenomenon of radical Islamism has perplexed many Western analysts. To the Islamists themselves it is all quite clear: their movement is simply a reaction by pious believers to contemporary iniquity. Their successes can be attributed to divine intervention and their failures to satanic interference. For liberals and modernizing nationalists, the rise of Islamism is more troubling. It is a movement characterized by worship of irrational authority and unremitting hostility to the Twentieth Century that appears to increase its following every year, not only among the backward and uneducated masses and traditional exploiters, but also among the scientifically trained intelligentsia—precisely the social group that the modernizers look to. Western Orientalists talk about the region’s inherent irrationality and mumble sagely about the impossibility of eradicating a thousand-year tradition. But this explains nothing.

The petty bourgeoisie in the Arab world, both traditionalist and modernist, has problems which drive it to seek irrational solutions. Squeezed by foreign capital, sucked dry by parasitical and corrupt neo-colonial state bureaucracies, and profoundly disturbed by the prospect of industrial conflict, the petty bourgeoisie is highly susceptible to the reactionary nostalgia proffered by Islamic fundamentalists. The Islamists denounce all the bugbears of the petty bourgeoisie—foreign competition, “cultural imperialism,” working-class upheaval and statism. Their opposition to class struggle, their call on the rich to be charitable and the poor to be patient, expresses the social standpoint of the middle layers.

In many cases the militant Islamists have received substantial financial support from traditional elites, particularly those threatened by the growth of the secular state and/or foreign capital. The radicals’ interpretation of the *sharia* usually is flexible enough to allow Islamists to appeal to more worldly motives when necessary. The Afghan *mujahedin* ignored the Quranic prohibitions on usury in their *jihad* to protect the prerogatives of the moneylenders and the landlords.

Islamic movements have often been encouraged by those in power as a bulwark against the left. Even where they are frowned upon, the state authorities find it much harder to crack down on religious dissidents than on secular radicals. The familiarity of Islamic themes and ritual have made it easier for the fundamentalists to grow among sections of the

population traditionally resistant to new ideas. In societies without social welfare systems, the newly urbanized poor are often dependent on charity organized through the mosques for their very survival. This gives the Islamists the ability to mobilize large numbers of lumpenized or semi-proletarian elements in the cities.

Militant Islamic fundamentalism is a relatively recent phenomenon. When Saudi Arabia’s King Faisal set up the World Muslim League in 1962 to oppose Marxism and radical Arab nationalism, it had little appeal. Instead of embracing obscurantism, young people joined the socialist and nationalist left in huge numbers. In the 1960s the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the largest Islamic organization of the day, vacillated between supporting and opposing Gamal Abdel Nasser, the main apostle of the “Arab Revolution.” Qutb, Egypt’s pre-eminent radical fundamentalist, was at that point seen as a member of a lunatic fringe. This all began to change with the defeat of Egypt and its allies in the Six Day War against Israel in 1967, when Nasser was humiliated at the hands of the Zionist state. Suddenly radical Islamist groups that had previously been no more than tiny minorities began to gain the ear of the masses.

Arab nationalism once inspired the middle classes with its promises of independence, non-alignment and democracy. But yesterday’s “anti-imperialist” regimes are today’s obsequious servants of the IMF and Western investment bankers. The “Arab socialist” republics are reviled as overgrown and corrupt police states. The Stalinist parties, which once played leadership roles in important sections of the workers’ movement in the region, are deeply discredited by decades of opportunist adaptation to a succession of “progressive” bourgeois figures (both secular and religious). The collapse of “actually existing socialism” in the former Soviet bloc is seen by the popular masses, and much of the left, as proof that the socialist project is not a viable alternative.

The Muslim extremists have benefited from the disintegration of their secular competitors. Yet there is tremendous potential for the growth of a revolutionary current within the proletariat. A combative workers’ movement would be a pole of attraction for both the sub-proletarian urban masses and the discontented petty bourgeoisie. Without this it is not surprising that the intermediate layers embrace irrational solutions to the dislocations and depredations of the imperialist world order.

### Iran’s Islamic Revolution: Suicide of the Left

Since the overthrow of the shah, many Western experts have asserted that Shiism is inherently more political than Sunna. But in the 1950s the Iranian mullahs were far from militant. Before his death in 1961, Ayatollah Borujerdi, Khomeini’s mentor and Iran’s leading cleric, preached passive acceptance of worldly authority. The Shiite *ulama* had cautiously supported the left-nationalist Mossadegh government, which was overthrown by a CIA-engineered royalist coup in 1953. After the restoration of the shah, even the bolder clerics, like Khomeini, asked for no more than a return to the 1906 constitution, which accorded the *ulama* an advisory function within a constitutional monarchy.

To consolidate his grip, the shah enlisted the help of the CIA and Israeli intelligence in establishing the SAVAK, Iran’s powerful political police. By the early 1960s the regime initiated a modernization drive (the so-called “White Revolution”) which included a limited land reform, profit sharing for industrial workers, female suffrage and mass co-education. The modernization program was intended to broaden popular support for the regime by undercutting its secular opponents on the left. In doing so the government antago-

nized the large landowners, the traditional bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie of the bazaar and the *ulama*.

Khomeini, who was beginning to emerge as the shah's leading opponent, denounced the regime's "revolution" and advocated a full-fledged theocracy, under the rule of a "learned jurisprudent." He denounced the regime's venality, corruption, violations of Islamic morality and its connections to the Americans and Israelis. When Khomeini was arrested, on 5 June 1963, a wave of mass protests swept Iran, which were ruthlessly suppressed by the SAVAK and the army. An estimated 10,000 demonstrators were killed.

Khomeini was exiled in 1964. During the next fifteen years, he and the radical *ulama* hegemonized popular opposition to the shah. This was a remarkable development given the historic strength of leftist ideas and organizations within the powerful Iranian working class. It was facilitated by the repeated attempts of the Iranian Stalinist Tudeh Party to maneuver with the regime, while Khomeini intransigently called for its overthrow. In his book *Islamic Fundamentalism*, Dilip Hiro describes how the Imam established himself as the authoritative leader of the movement against the shah:

"[Khomeini] kept the alliance together during a highly turbulent period by championing the cause of each of the groups in the anti-Shah coalition, and maintaining a studied silence on such controversial issues as democracy, agrarian reform and the status of women. He aroused hopes of deliverance and improvement in different strata of society. The traditional middle class saw in Khomeini an upholder of private property, a partisan of the bazaar, and a believer in Islamic values. The modern middle class regarded Khomeini as a radical nationalist wedded to the programme adopted earlier by Mussadiq: ending royal dictatorship and foreign influences in Iran. The urban working class backed Khomeini because of his repeated commitment to social justice which, it felt, could be achieved only by transferring power and wealth from the affluent to the needy. Finally, the rural poor saw the Ayatollah as their saviour: the one to provide them with arable land, irrigation facilities, roads, schools and electricity."

Khomeini was not the only one to keep a tactful silence on topics like democracy, agrarian reform and women's rights (not to mention socialism and workers' rule)—the Iranian left also submerged these issues in favor of solidarizing with the religious opposition's denunciations of the shah and his U.S. backers. Yet it was the shah's land redistribution and introduction of female suffrage that had propelled Khomeini into intransigent opposition in the first place.

This grotesque opportunism had tragic consequences for the Iranian workers' movement. In September 1978, after the regime imposed martial law, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators marched in Tehran, chanting "Down with the Shah!" and demanding an Islamic republic. The government responded as it had in 1963, with bullets, and hundreds were slain. But this time, instead of quelling the protests, the massacre enraged millions of previously inactive citizens who suddenly poured into the streets.

The economically strategic oil workers (among whom the pro-Moscow Stalinists in the Tudeh Party had considerable influence) went on strike and were soon joined by workers in other industries. After a few months of continuing labor unrest and mass demonstrations, the Peacock Throne toppled. In the decisive confrontation with the Imperial Guard in February 1979, the New Leftist/Stalinist *Fedayin* and left-Muslim *Mujahedin* guerrillas provided the military leadership.

Yet the Iranian left had marginalized itself through its wilful political subordination to Khomeini, the supposed representative of the "progressive, anti-imperialist" petty bourgeoisie.

The oil workers, leftist students, women, national and religious minorities who joined the demonstrations calling for "Down with the shah," did not want to replace the hated monarchy with a theocracy. Yet none of the left groups were prepared to "isolate" themselves from the mass movement through directly criticizing the mullahs. A genuinely revolutionary organization would have sought to drive forward the workers' struggles against the regime, while, at the same time, politically counterposing the perspective of a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government to the Khomeinites' call for an Islamic republic.

The Iranian left saw Khomeini as the embodiment of a "first stage" in a supposedly inexorable revolutionary process, and closed their eyes to the fundamentally reactionary character of his Islamic Revolution. The mullahs had no equivalent illusions. They immediately organized "Revolutionary Guards," and began to attack leftists, unveiled women, homosexuals, unionists and other "enemies of Islam." In March 1979, a mass demonstration of women protesting the imposition of the Islamic code was attacked by government-sponsored mobs and then fired upon by "revolutionary" troops. As Khomeini's regime consolidated, the badly disoriented leftist organizations were isolated and crushed one by one. Some eventually attempted to resist, while others continued to proclaim their fealty to their hangman all the way to the gallows.

One would expect that the attitude of professed Marxists toward religious theocrats (whether Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic or whatever) would be one of total and irreconcilable hostility. Yet various Western leftists, not themselves believers, have purported to discern a progressive or partially progressive character in Islamist movements. This is a product of an invidious Third Worldism, which at bottom boils down to simple liberalism. Many socialists, who are alert to the dangers of Christian fundamentalism in the U.S., seek to prettify radical Islamic movements as egalitarian and anti-imperialist. When the Iranian left made the fatal mistake of bowing to Khomeini, it was mimicked by every major international socialist current, both Stalinist and ostensibly Trotskyist, with the single exception of the then-revolutionary international Spartacist tendency (iSt), which alone refused to hail the triumph of Islamic reaction over the shah.

## Afghanistan: State Department Jihad

While Iran's Islamists were loudly proclaiming their enmity for American imperialism, their Afghan brethren were aligning with the "Great Satan" in a U.S.-sponsored *jihad* against that country's pro-Soviet secular regime. In April 1978 the People's Democratic Party (PDPA) took power in a defensive coup, promising radical reform and modernization. It passed laws redistributing land to those who tilled it and cancelling old debts, an extremely important reform in a country where debt bondage and usury were the preeminent forms of exploitation. The exploiters' resistance to these measures quickly took on an Islamic coloration. As Hiro explains:

"Decree 6 abolished all pre-1973 mortgages and debts, and drastically reduced the excessive interest (often 100 per cent a year) on later loans....More often than not village mullahs, having blood ties with landlord-moneylenders, ruled that cancellation of debts amounted to stealing, and was therefore unIslamic. (On the other hand the pro-regime minority among clerics cited the Quranic verse against *riba*, usury.) Many rural mullahs began preaching against the government in an environment where armed resistance against the regime took the form of murdering Marxist teachers and civil servants."

The mullahs were equally appalled by Decree 7, which granted women equal legal rights, abolished child marriage and reduced the bride price to a nominal amount. While the PDPA maintained state payments to mullahs who refrained from denouncing it, the clergy provided much of the leadership for the U.S.-funded and equipped counterrevolutionary revolt. The opposition included traditionalist fundamentalists aligned with the Pakistani and Saudi governments, but the largest single group was Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e Islami*, which sought to create an Islamic republic like the one in Iran.

The Soviet intervention in 1979 posed the possibility of major social progress in Afghanistan through extension of Soviet social relations. Yet that possibility was never realized. From the outset, the Kremlin pressured its Kabul client into making concessions to the traditionalist reactionaries. The PDPA built mosques, propagated Islam on state television and watered down its reforms. When Mikhail Gorbachev withdrew Soviet troops in 1989, the Afghan regime adopted Islam as the state religion. None of this appeased the Islamic reactionaries or their imperialist backers.

Nonetheless, the Afghan Stalinists survived their Soviet patrons and were only finally overthrown in April 1992. They lasted as long as they did in the face of overwhelming odds largely because of the determination of much of the urban population, including most of the working class, to resist Islamic rule and avoid the inevitable bloodbath after the *mujahedin* took power. Even before the PDPA was overthrown and its social reforms demolished, the Afghan "freedom fighters" fell out among themselves. The Western media, which spent a decade lionizing these reactionaries and their resistance to "Soviet imperialism," have long since lost interest in Afghanistan, which continues to be torn apart by squalid factional feuding among the various Islamic militias.

### Algeria: IMF Austerity & Religious Reaction

For the past four years Algeria has been gripped by a brutal conflict between the bonapartist military regime, backed by French imperialism, and a powerful Islamist movement. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in a conflict whose origins can be traced back to the early 1980s, when slumping oil prices saddled Algeria with an enormous debt. The National Liberation Front (FLN) government, headed by President Chadli Benjedid, responded with austerity, privatization and destruction of Algeria's elaborate system of state subsidies for consumer necessities. To counteract his regime's resulting unpopularity, Benjedid turned to "Islamization." In 1984 the FLN promulgated a Family Law incorporating the *sharia* into Algerian civil law, legalizing polygamy and giving men legal authority over their wives and unmarried daughters. These changes were vigorously opposed by women's organizations and leftists. The FLN countered by turning to the *ulama* and encouraging them to organize disaffected youth against the opponents of god's law. Soon gangs of young fundamentalist thugs were roaming around, breaking up meetings of leftists and feminists, and terrorizing Algeria's French and Berber-speaking minorities, as the police looked the other way.

Over time the regime's growing economic dependence on France and the International Monetary Fund led much of the population to regard it as a stooge for foreign imperialism. In October 1988 hundreds of thousands of youths rioted, demanding the democracy and egalitarianism which were part of the FLN's "socialist" rhetoric. The regime responded with a combination of sticks and carrots. In 1989, a new, pseudo-democratic constitution was approved by referendum. Political parties were legalized. This opened up possibilities for the left, but it also permitted the Islamists to coalesce under the

banner of the ultra-reactionary Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which emerged as the strongest opposition group.

From its origins, the FIS, which regards both democracy and socialism as "Jewish-Masonic plots," has been deeply hostile to the labor movement. In 1991, when the UGTA labor federation (based among oil and chemical workers, dockers and other skilled workers) called a general strike demanding a price freeze, FIS-organized gangs attacked the unionists.

In late 1991 the FIS appeared to be on the verge of winning the first multi-party parliamentary election ever held in post-colonial Algeria. To prevent this, the military, which had for decades been the real power in the country, launched a preemptive coup in January 1992. The generals forced Algeria's long-time president and FLN-head Benjedid to resign, suspended the constitution and declared a state of emergency. Thousands of FIS sympathizers were placed in desert detention camps. The death penalty was reintroduced and torture was used to extract confessions (*Amnesty International Annual Report 1993*). In addition thousands of fundamentalists were killed in extra-judicial executions.

After the coup, the FIS split, with the "moderates" looking for some imperialist-sponsored deal which would allow them to share power and impose the *sharia* on the population. The more intransigent Islamists coalesced in the rival Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) and Armed Islamic Groups (GIA), which launched large-scale terror campaigns against secular intellectuals, feminists, leftists, Berbers, Western tourists, and each other, in addition to the state authorities.

The remnants of the deposed FLN attempted to act as a mediator for a government of "national reconciliation" which was to include the FIS. This approach was favored by U.S. imperialism, while France stuck by the military regime, as a reward for its loyal service in protecting French investments. The military was also supported by those sectors of the population which had the most to fear from an Islamist takeover. In the early days of the conflict, UGTA-initiated demonstrations supporting the generals against Islamist terrorism drew hundreds of thousands of protesters.

It has long been clear that the military, which made various overtures to the Islamists on the basis of a shared anti-communism, could at any time strike some kind of deal with the FIS "moderates" and turn its guns on the workers' movement. In the aftermath of the November 1995 elections, in which three-quarters of eligible voters reportedly participated (despite threats by the Islamist terrorists and a boycott by the bourgeois "Berber Rights" Front of Socialist Forces, the FLN and the FIS), representatives of the FIS have agreed to sit down and negotiate a "global solution" with the military.

A precondition for successful proletarian-centered struggle in Algeria is establishing the complete independence of the labor movement from the bourgeois state and bourgeois parties. This is a very real question in a country where, for decades, the union leadership functioned as a partner of the FLN regime. The organized workers' movement can begin to break the hold of the Islamists on sections of the urban plebeian masses through using the leverage of the existing unions to aid the struggles of the poor, the unemployed, the unskilled and semi-skilled urban workers and the rural semi-proletariat.

A revolutionary program for Algeria must include democratic demands for the separation of mosque and state and for the defense of women, Berbers, homosexuals, religious minorities and all other victims and potential victims of the Islamic reactionaries. The response to terrorist attacks by the fundamentalists on the Algerian left and workers' movement must be to organize effective united-front defense, independent of the repressive state. In contrast to FIS leader Madani's

empty denunciation of “Western infidels,” a revolutionary party would advocate the cancellation of the imperialist debt and link the expropriation of foreign capital to the struggle to overturn the rule of the Algerian bourgeoisie.

### Anti-Muslim Hysteria and Imperialist Hypocrisy

Ever since Khomeini’s unanticipated triumph over the shah destroyed one of American imperialism’s key strategic assets, the Western media have been busy churning out anti-Muslim propaganda. With the collapse of the USSR, Arab terrorists have replaced Russians as Hollywood’s favorite bad guys. Pro-imperialist liberals have used incidents such as the Iranian mullahs’ threat to assassinate Salman Rushdie to contrast Islamic barbarism with the “civilized” West. The promotion of anti-Arab racism is particularly useful as a justification for contemporary crusades to “rescue” the modern equivalent of the Holy Sepulchre: the oil fields of the Middle East.

Concerns about Islamic fundamentalism also provide an acceptable cover for U.S. State Department intellectuals to express their fascination with the possibility of future race wars. In the Summer 1993 issue of the influential American publication, *Foreign Affairs*, Samuel Huntington conjured up the specter of a “Confucian-Islamic” alliance between a Japanese/Chinese/East Asia bloc and a resurgent Islamic fundamentalist Middle East, directed against Western Christian hegemony. While the existence of such a pact is completely hallucinatory, Huntington’s piece (entitled “The Clash of Civilizations”) is symptomatic of the American bourgeoisie’s anxiety about one day being displaced from its current position atop the imperialist world order.

The hysterical opposition to Islam has translated into a wave of chauvinist attacks on Muslims living in Western countries. One example was the recent decision of the French government to ban the wearing of the *hijab* in public schools. Britain’s National Union of Students has come out in support of banning Islamic organizations on campuses. In the immediate aftermath of the criminal bombing of a federal government building in Oklahoma (apparently by Christian rightists), the U.S. media reflexively blamed Muslim extremists. This led to an outbreak of ugly racist attacks across the country. The labor movement in the imperialist countries must intransigently defend the democratic rights and religious freedom of Muslims, and oppose each and every instance of chauvinist behavior.

The hue and cry about Islamic religious extremism is particularly hypocritical coming from the U.S. rulers. Every recent American president, Democrat or Republican, has played to the backwardness of the American masses with professions of his own deeply-held Christian faith. At one point during his first term in the White House, Ronald Reagan remarked that he believed that the apocalypse prophesied in the Book of Revelations could be drawing very near. Unlike the most fanatic Islamic extremist, Reagan possessed the means to turn apocalyptic religious delusions into reality. Prior to launching the 1991 Gulf War, George Bush wheeled out Billy Graham, the all-purpose evangelical charlatan, to bless the U.S. military as it prepared the massacre of tens of thousands of defenseless Iraqis.

While Muslim fundamentalism may be widely denounced in the popular media, in the last analysis there is no necessary contradiction between imperialist interests and the Islamic theocrats. The U.S. has long maintained a cozy relationship with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, where the *sharia* is rigidly enforced. The State Department has also kept in touch with “moderate” Islamists, including elements in the Algerian FIS, and among the Iranian mullahs.

International investors are indifferent to the Islamists’ persecution of women and minorities, but they are impressed by their anti-communism and commitment to private property and social order. The more sophisticated capitalist commentators on the Middle East have no trouble distinguishing between the rhetoric and the substance of the Islamic “revolutionaries”:

“Too many Muslim countries are non-democracies, and too many of these non-democracies have governments that combine being inefficient and unpopular with not really having a grip on the places they supposedly rule. The status quo is not going to last. Awkwardly, the status quo is convenient for the West....

“...the source most likely to displace many existing governments—the Islamic revival—could in the long run prove a stabler partner for the West. In the short run, though, the collapse of the status quo is going to produce some angry quarrels.

“When these endanger genuine Western interests—a free market in oil, safe traffic in the air and on the sea, the security of decent allies [i.e., Israel]—the West must be ready to defend those interests. The more visibly determined it is to defend them, the less likely that it will actually have to pull a trigger. But the West should be clear in its mind that, properly handled, these quarrels are merely the usual difficulties of a time of transition; and that the aim, when the transition is complete, should be an easier relationship with a modernised Islam.”

—*Economist*, 6 August 1994

The imperialist powers had similar conflicts with an earlier generation of neo-colonial bourgeois nationalist regimes. While leftists must be prepared to bloc militarily with any indigenous elements in neo-colonial countries against imperialist intervention, the Islamists’ rhetorical anti-imperialism should not be allowed to obscure their fundamentally reactionary character.

### British SWP: ‘With the Islamists, Sometimes...’

In the November 1994 issue of *Socialist Review*, Chris Harman, a senior figure in Tony Cliff’s British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), correctly criticized the French Lutte Ouvriere organization for refusing to defend Muslim school-girls expelled for wearing the *hijab*. Yet Harman went beyond simply opposing such manifestations of religious (and racial) persecution by the French state, to suggest that the Islamists’ message is “two-sided.” He wrote that Islam is attractive to:

“many women for whom modern city life seems to offer little more than poverty and sexual harassment. They believe the Islamic code can somehow protect them from the commodification of their bodies, even if it also enforces a certain style of dress and enjoins them to respect the authority of their fathers and husbands. It certainly seems better than the society of the sex shop and the world bank, of rich women in western dresses and expensive make-up driving air conditioned cars while poor women watch their children die of hunger or diarrhoea.”

Unlike Islamic fanatics, Marxists are not opposed to sex shops, Western dresses, make-up or air conditioning. We know that the children of the poor die because of the imperatives of an irrational and exploitative economic world order. Harman’s suggestion that wearing the veil “seems better than the society of the sex shop” implies that Muslim women make a free and deliberate choice to exchange personal freedom for protection from the roving eyes of strange and lustful men. In fact the Islamic dress code is generally enforced through terrorizing those who dare defy it.

In “The Prophet and the Proletariat,” a major article in *International Socialism* (IS—Autumn 1994), the SWP’s theo-

retical journal, Harman quotes Ali Belhadj, leader of the extreme wing of the FIS, as saying:

“Can you conceive of any violence greater than that of this woman who burns the scarf in a public place, in the eyes of everyone, saying the Family Code penalises women and finding support from the effeminated, the half-men and the transexuals...

“It is not violence to demand that woman stays at home, in an atmosphere of chastity, reserve and humility and that she only goes out in cases of necessity defined by the legislator...to demand the segregation of sexes among school students and the absence of that stinking mixing that causes sexual violence...”

Harman places very little emphasis on the urgent necessity to combat the lethal danger posed by the FIS and its offshoots to unveiled women, “half men,” Berbers and Francophones. Toward the end of his 55-page article, he comments that, “as well as defending Islamists against the state we will also be involved in defending women, gays, Berbers or Copts against some Islamists.” But this reference to opposition to the excesses by “some” Islamists (presented in the context of defense of the Islamists) contrasts with the tilt of the rest of the article, in which the would-be theocrats, who inspire and organize the attacks against the “infidels,” are depicted as “petty bourgeois utopians”:

“Radical Islamism, with its project of reconstituting society on the model established by Mohammed in 7th century Arabia, is, in fact, a ‘utopia’ emanating from an impoverished section of the new middle class....

“Socialists cannot regard petty bourgeois utopians as our prime enemies.”

Who then does Harman consider to be the “prime enemy” of Iran’s workers, leftists, Kurds, gays and women? From the safety of his English study he reassures his readers that: “Islamism cannot freeze economic and therefore social development any more than any other ideology can.” Cold comfort for Algerian Berbers, Coptic Christians in Egypt, blacks in Sudan, as well as homosexuals and leftists throughout the region.

### Cliffites & Iran’s ‘Revolutionary’ Mullahs

Harman’s detached, philosophical attitude toward the Islamic fundamentalists is not a matter of an individual blindspot. In general the SWP leadership, motivated by a combination of Third Worldist pseudo-anti-imperialism and anti-Sovietism, has tended to view the Islamists favorably. Harman tut-tuts about how “the great bulk of the Iranian left” initially portrayed the “Islamist movements as ‘progressive’, ‘anti-imperialist’ movements of the oppressed,” yet, at the time, the SWP itself was downplaying the danger of the Islamic reactionaries:

“The most prominent leaders of the opposition are the Muslim leaders. The press plays this up. For all his brutality, runs the argument, the Shah is preferable to the backward religious ‘freaks’. This only highlights the ignorance of the press.

“Iran has never been a hot-bed of Muslim fanaticism. Unlike other Arab states, there are no extreme right wing organisations with religious links here. Quite the opposite. They are at the head of the mass opposition movement because there is no alternative. Both the left and the nationalists are too weak to challenge their leadership.”

—*Socialist Worker*, 16 September 1978

The essential “weakness” of the Iranian left was *political*—it closed its eyes to the reality of the Khomeinites and went along with their “revolutionary” mass movement against the shah. In his *International Socialism* article Harman finds it necessary to devote an extensive footnote criticizing an ear-

lier article, “Islamic Fundamentalism—Oppression and Revolution,” that appeared in the Autumn 1988 issue of the same journal. Harman criticizes its author, Phil Marshall, for depicting the Islamists as those who simply “express the struggle against imperialism,” for his failure “to see the petty bourgeoisie [sic] limitations of Islamist movements” and for mistakenly equating them with “the rising, anti-colonialist movements of the early 1920s.”

But Marshall was only expressing the line of the SWP leadership. Harman is uncomfortably aware that his criticism of other leftists for adapting politically to the mullahs can also be applied to the SWP. In an article on the Iran/Iraq war, published at the same time as Marshall’s (almost ten years after Khomeini came to power), Alex Callinicos, regarded as the group’s most able theorist, explained the SWP’s idea of a revolutionary strategy for the Iranian left:

“It would have meant revolutionaries demanding that the mullahs wage a *revolutionary* war against the US and its allies, that, as I wrote at the beginning of the war, they ‘make Tehran the beacon of *genuine* revolution throughout the region—granting the right of self-determination to the Kurds, Arabs and other national minorities, establishing organs of popular power, fighting for the liberation of women from the Islamic yoke’. (*Socialist Worker*, 4 October 1980)”

—*Socialist Worker Review*, September 1988, emphasis in original

Presumably the SWP would not demand that the mullahs act as “the beacon of *genuine* revolution” unless they considered them to be leading “‘progressive,’ ‘anti-imperialist’ movements of the oppressed.”

In attempting to clean up the SWP’s record, Harman downplays the centrality of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the events leading up to the overthrow of the shah. Yet the facts are well established. In *The Wrath of Allah*, published in 1983 by Pluto Press, Ramy Nima (an associate of Mike Kidron, a long-time Cliff supporter) recounted how the cycle of protests that ultimately toppled the shah began with a January 1978 article in the regime’s semi-official press that:

“labelled the clergy as ‘black reactionaries’ and charged Khomeini with being a British spy receiving funds from England and with being really a foreigner (this Indian Sayyed) who had written love poems of an erotic nature. “This article was the spark that ignited a series of explosive events which shook the Pahlavi regime to its foundations. Theology students in Qom staged a massive demonstration. The bazaar closed down in protest...In the ensuing two days of fighting some 70 people were killed and over and 500 injured.

“The incident at Qom marks the point from which the religious opposition, under the leadership of the militant clergy and the mosque, moved towards an Islamic revolution and an inevitable collision with the forces of the state.”

Harman acknowledges that Khomeini’s name “had come to symbolise opposition to the monarchy,” but minimizes the extent to which Islamist ideology characterized the protests:

“On his return to Teheran in January 1979 he [Khomeini] became the symbolic leader of the revolution.

“Yet at this stage he was far from controlling events, even though he had an acute sense of political tactics. The key events that brought the Shah down—the spread of strikes, the mutiny inside the armed forces—occurred completely independently of him.”

Harman is attempting a bit of political sleight-of-hand here. Khomeini was the central figure (as well as the “symbolic leader”) long before he stepped off the airplane in January 1979, but this does not mean that he personally controlled events in every barrack, school and factory. His political program, codified in the demand for an “Islamic Republic,” was the axis of the upheavals; his clerics organized the mass pro-

tests and his slogan, "Allah Akbar" (god is great) predominated. One need only look at photos of the demonstrations with their pictures of the Imam, their veiled women, and the slogans, to understand that the Iranian Revolution that so excited the SWP was politically hegemonized by the mullahs.

The Cliffites explicitly compared the situation in Iran to "the two great revolutionary upsurges in Chile and Portugal in the early Seventies," (*Socialist Worker* [SW] 24 February 1979), portraying it as a situation in which a rising workers' movement confronted the capitalist state power. Khomeini was treated as a figure who had only a marginal connection to events—a sort of Father Gapon. The 3 February 1979 *Socialist Worker* wrote: "Khomeini arises out of a vacuum, left by the absence of any party to which workers can give support and which can support them."

Picking up on this, Cliff's Canadian supporters published an article in the February 1979 issue of their paper entitled "The form—religion; The spirit—revolution." It commented:

"Khomeini has many reactionary views. He is an absolute anti-communist. But, for the time being Khomeini is a symbolic focus for a revolt...."

"But to believe the people of Iran are fighting and dying in their hundreds and thousands only to let one reactionary leader be replaced by another is absurd."

With the benefit of hindsight Harman now considers that:

"The victory of Khomeini's forces in Iran was not, then, inevitable and neither does it prove that Islamism is a uniquely reactionary force....It merely confirms that, in the absence of independent working class leadership, revolutionary upheaval can give way to more than one form of the reestablishment of bourgeois rule...."

—*International Socialism*, Autumn 1994

Khomeini's victory over the working class was only "inevitable" because his leftist opponents closed their eyes to the dangers posed by the Islamists. They passively acquiesced to his leadership and consoled themselves with the same kind of celebration of the Islamic Revolution that Cliff's followers were retailing abroad. In all this, the role of the socialist vanguard was entrusted to the unfolding of some inexorable historical process.

It is not enough to abstractly invoke the desirability of an "independent working class leadership" as Harman does. It was necessary to specify what programmatic positions such an "independent" formation should advance. The Iranian workers needed to be told the simple truth that life under the mullahs would be as bad as under the SAVAK, and that they should oppose the Khomeinites' attempts to establish an Islamic republic and counterpose the fight for a workers' republic.

Throughout the critical months, *Socialist Worker* was busy asking questions like "Iran: Can Soldiers Beat the Generals?" (10 February 1979) and advising that, "If they are to be won over they must be convinced that the revolution will bring an improvement in their life back home." The next week, after the mullahs triumphed, *Socialist Worker's* headline read "Iran: The glory" (17 February 1979). The same week the headline on the front page of *Workers Vanguard*, the main organ of the international Spartacist tendency (from which the International Bolshevik Tendency derives) had a different message: "Down with Khomeini! For Workers Revolution! Mullahs Win." For the SWP and the rest of the opportunists, this was absurd "sectarianism."

It is remarkable how closely the SWP's explanations for its political adaptation parallel those of the Iranian Stalinists, who distinguished themselves on the Iranian left as the most craven apologists for the mullahs' political revolution.

"The Tudeh Party of Iran considered the formation of a *united popular front* the main pre-condition for the victory of the revolution and it was with such a strategy and tactics that it actively participated in the February 1979 Revolution. The victory of the Revolution and the character it assumed proved the correctness of the Party's analysis. The 1979 Revolution was a national-democratic revolution with a popular, anti-monarchical, anti-dictatorial and anti-imperialist content. Despite the current regime's propaganda the Revolution did not have an Islamic content. The February Revolution had a class and social character. At the same time, it is also a fact that the revolutionary movement in the country had, for specific reasons, a religious form."

—"Assessment of the Policies of the Tudeh Party of Iran during the years 1979-83," *Documents of the National Conference of the Tudeh Party of Iran* (1986), emphasis in original

Following Khomeini's victory, the SWP joined the Tudeh and the rest of the Iranian left in backing Tehran in its squalid war with Sadaam Hussein's Iraq. And, of course, Cliff & Co. also fulsomely supported the reactionary CIA-funded Afghan *mujahedin* in its war against the modernizing PDPA government and their Soviet backers. Harman's slogan summarizing the Cliffites' policy ("With the Islamists sometimes, with the state never") represents a generalization of the earlier disastrous support to the Khomeinists against the shah.

## Down With Islamic Reaction!

Harman sagely opines that leftists tend to make symmetrical errors on Islamism: they either regard it as reactionary or as progressive and anti-imperialist. Harman seeks the middle ground and suggests that the doctrines of political Islam are sufficiently contradictory that they can be given virtually any class content:

"[Islamists] grow on the soil of very large social groups that suffer under existing society, and whose feeling of revolt could be tapped for progressive purposes, providing a lead came from a rising level of workers' struggle. And even short of such a rise in the struggle, many of the individuals attracted to radical versions of Islamism can be influenced by socialists—provided socialists combine complete political independence from all forms of Islamism with a willingness to seize opportunities to draw individual Islamists into genuinely radical forms of struggle alongside them.

"Radical Islamism is full of contradictions. The petty bourgeoisie is always pulled in two directions—towards radical rebellion against existing society and towards compromise with it. And so Islamism is always caught between rebelling in order to bring about a complete resurrection of the Islamic community, and compromising in order to impose Islamic 'reforms'."

Every variety of false consciousness is full of contradictions. But the Islamists' "radical rebellion" is not aimed at the oppressive and exploitative social relations of the existing order; rather, they oppose the very limited freedoms the downtrodden have won for themselves. The radical fundamentalists are in no way preferable to their more moderate brethren; they merely use more extreme tactics in pursuit of essentially the same anti-working class goals.

The Islamist movement has been used as a battering ram to destroy proletarian institutions, break strikes and persecute the specially oppressed. Harman quotes Algeria's FIS leader, Abassi Madani, explaining why he helped break a garbage workers' strike in March 1991:

"There are strikes of trade unions that have become terrains for action by the corrupters, the enemies of Allah and the fatherland, communists and others, who are spreading everywhere because the cadre of the FLN have retreated."

Yet Harman treats the FIS leadership's strikebreaking as if it somehow contradicted its desire for state power:

"In reality, the more powerful the FIS became, the more it was caught between respectability and insurrectionism, telling the masses they could not strike in March 1991 and then calling on them to overthrow the state two months later in May."

The confusion is Harman's, not Madani's. The FIS's insurrectionism, like that of other extreme Islamist groups, is directly connected to its hostility to the labor movement. The "masses" Madani was appealing to—desperate petty bourgeois and lumpen youth—did not include the workers, whose strikes he opposed; in fact, the FIS's whole project was to mobilize the former to smash the latter.

Harman's reasoning reflects the same "optimistic" objectivism that led the SWP leadership (and the rest of the impressionistic left) to support Khomeini's Islamic Revolution in 1978. The basic idea is simple—any mobilization against the state, even with an avowedly reactionary leadership and intent, is to be welcomed because it will encourage mass self-activity, which must eventually take a socialist direction.

Harman does concede that:

"There is no automatic progression from seeing the limitations of Islamic reformism to moving to revolutionary politics. Rather the limitations of reformism lead either to the terrorism and guerrillaism of groups that try to act without a mass base, or in the direction of a reactionary attack on scapegoats for the problems of the system."

However he also suggests that "Islamic reformists" who turn militant can play a positive role, and criticizes those leftists who, "fail to take into account the destabilising effect of the [Islamist] movements on capital's interests right across the Middle East," and concludes:

"Islamism...both mobilises popular bitterness and paralyses it; both builds up people's feelings that something must be done and directs those feelings into blind alleys; both destabilises the state and limits the real struggle against the state."

What Harman does not (and cannot) explain is why socialists should welcome destabilization by reactionary, theocratic movements. In the January 1994 issue of *Socialist Review*, the SWP has no trouble labelling the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), notorious for organizing pogroms against India's Muslim community, as "near fascist." Yet he applies different criteria to the essentially similar Islamic fundamentalists.

Harman argues that the Islamists should not be considered as reactionaries *per se*:

"The aspiration to recreate a mythical past involves not leaving existing society intact, but recasting it. What is more, the recasting cannot aim to produce a carbon copy of 7th century Islam, since the Islamists do not reject every feature of existing society. By and large they accept modern industry, modern technology and much of the science on which it is based—indeed, they argue that Islam, as a more rational and less superstitious doctrine than Christianity, is more in tune with modern science. And so the 'revivalists' are, in fact, trying to bring about something which has never existed before, which fuses ancient traditions and the forms of modern social life.

"This means it is wrong simply to refer to all Islamists as 'reactionary' or to equate 'Islamic fundamentalism' as a whole with the sort of Christian fundamentalism which is the bastion of the right wing of the Republican Party in the US."

Reactionary appeals for a return to traditional values *inevitably* invoke a golden age that never actually existed. Pat Robertson, and the rest of the Christian reactionaries in the Republican Party, may dream of turning back the clock 80 or

100 years, but they do not want to recreate the America in which the radical Knights of Labor and the Wobblies commanded the allegiance of many working people. Like their Muslim counterparts, Christian fundamentalists "accept modern industry, modern technology and much of the science on which it is based," and only reject those parts of science which conflict with holy scripture. They are downright enthusiastic about digital communications, satellite technology and new missile delivery systems.

There is of course an important distinction between the character of political reaction in a dependent capitalist country like Iran or Algeria, and an imperialist superpower. But Harman's objection to "equating" the ideologies of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism would only make sense if he considers Islam somehow closer to truth than Christianity. Surely it is no more rational to believe that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets than that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

### Swimming Against the Stream

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a response to a century of imperialist domination. It is, among other things, an attempt by a section of the people of the region—particularly the petty-bourgeois elements—to assert their identity against the economically and culturally dominant Western powers. But much of the left refuses to learn—even when the lesson is written in its own blood—that every response to oppression is not necessarily healthy or progressive. Obscurantism, radical particularism, the celebration of the most backward aspects of traditional cultures and a rejection of social progress, science and enlightenment as "Western decadence"—these are among the familiar reactionary byproducts of the imperialist age. And they are no less reactionary because they are embraced by multitudes of imperialism's victims. Marxists must understand the genesis of such mass pathologies without themselves being infected by them.

The SWP's inability to draw the simple lesson from its opportunism over the Iranian Revolution—that Islamic fundamentalism is reactionary—is shared by the United Secretariat and most of the smaller groupings in the international "Trotskyist" left. All these groups swear by Trotsky's opposition to the Stalinized Comintern's support for the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) in the 1920s. Yet Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, purported to be heading a revolutionary struggle to dispossess the feudal landowners, win democratic rights for working people and liberate women from their oppression. In fact Chiang was so "left" that he signed on as an honorary member of the Communist International, and loudly praised the Bolshevik Revolution. In short, he appeared far to the left of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the leaders of the reactionary Islamic fundamentalists of today. Yet the Left Opposition, headed by Trotsky, warned that in supporting the KMT, the Chinese communists were putting their heads on the chopping block.

Unlike the KMT, contemporary Islamists make no pretense of leftism, or pushing forward the rights of women or the oppressed. They do not deign to conceal their reactionary views and aims. The social base of the Islamic revival, which so impresses the opportunist left, ultimately derives from the economic deformations inflicted on neo-colonial countries by imperialism. The only way to establish the economic foundations for the social liberation of the masses of the Muslim world is through the revolutionary victory of the working class, at the head of all the oppressed and exploited, committed to expropriating the imperialists and their local allies. Forging the kind of party capable of leading such a social revolution requires, as a precondition, intransigent opposition to religious reaction. ■



## 2. Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: 1979-89

### PART 2A: RESPONSES TO THE SOVIET INVASION

#### Document 2a.1

##### *Down with Islamic Reaction*

##### **Hail the Red Army in Afghanistan!**

*The following article, described as "adapted from Workers Vanguard," was printed in the February-March 1980 issue of Spartacist Canada (no. 41). Tom Riley, currently the editor of 1917, edited Spartacist Canada at the time.*

The effective deployment of several tens of thousands of Soviet troops in Afghanistan is one more stinging humiliation for American imperialism in the Near East. Seeing Washington at an impasse with the ayatollah, the Kremlin bureaucrats seized the time to quell the uprising by the Afghan mullahs and khans (religious and tribal heads).

Anti-Soviet opinion around the world—from the White House to the Chinese Great Hall of the People, from the "non-aligned" neo-colonies like Zambia to the Spanish and Italian Communist Parties—railed against "Soviet expansionism" which had "trampled on the national sovereignty and integrity of Afghanistan." The imperialist media pulled out the stops to build sympathy for "freedom fighters" battling sophisticated tanks and planes with sticks, stones and chants of "allah akbar."

But in the military confrontation pitting the Soviet soldiers backing the nationalist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) against the feudal and pre-feudal forces aided by imperialism, Marxists side with the Russian tanks. Hail the Red Army!

##### **Carter's Cold-War Frenzy**

The pretext of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was exploited by President Carter and his Dr. Strangelove national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to translate the Cold War rhetoric of their anti-Soviet "human rights crusade" into action. On January 4 Carter went on TV to announce that the U.S. was going to engage in economic warfare against the USSR: 17 million tons of grain already ordered by the Soviet Union would not be shipped; sales of high technology products, such as advanced computers and oil-drilling equipment would be cut off; four Coast Guard cutters were dispatched to Alaska to protect the fish from Russian aggression; scheduled openings of consular facilities were stopped, as were any new cultural and economic exchanges. Carter has since pledged that the U.S. will boycott the Moscow Olympics if the Soviet troops are not withdrawn from Afghanistan by mid-February.

Over the Teheran embassy crisis Carter pledged not to use food deliveries as an economic weapon against Iran. In his State of the Union message, Carter stated:

"We have no basic quarrel with the nation, revolution or the people of Iran. The threat to them comes not from Ameri-

can policy but from Soviet actions in the region. We are prepared to work with the Government of Iran to develop a new and mutually beneficial relationship."

—*New York Times*, 23 January

But against the Soviet Union, which needs American grain in order to increase meat production and improve the diet of its population, the United States uses nutritional blackmail in the hopes of fomenting social discontent. Carter's message is: Starve for human rights! Canada's lame-duck Prime Minister Joe Clark, following suit, agreed not to increase Canadian grain shipments and halted all high technology trade and cultural exchanges with the USSR.

American Secretary of Defense Brown was dispatched to Peking to deepen the anti-Soviet U.S./China alliance, already twice tested militarily: over the South African invasion of Angola and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. Now the Pentagon wants the People's Liberation Army to channel arms to the reactionary Afghan rebels through their mutual military client, Pakistan. With unprecedentedly forthright bellicosity, Brown's toast at a state banquet called on Peking to join American imperialism "with complementary actions in the field of defense as well as diplomacy." Now most of the cards are on the table.

We are presently experiencing a major shift of the international order as it was shaped in the aftermath of World War II. Such changes do not occur overnight and to place the turning point at 1 January 1980 would be dangerously misleading. From Potsdam, Truman's policies sought an imperialist alliance against the USSR; and the new anti-Soviet action was already foreshadowed by Washington's complicity in last year's Chinese invasion of Vietnam. Whether it is the "human rights" rhetoric of Vance or the McCarthyite demonology of Brzezinski, the target of Carter's onslaught is the Soviet Union and the threat of the new realignment is imperialist war to obliterate the conquests of the October Revolution.

Ever since taking office Jimmy Carter has sought to morally and militarily rearm American imperialism and pull the U.S. out of what the Pentagon sees as its post-Vietnam paralysis. His claims to have recently changed his opinion of the Russians to the contrary, Carter is simply milking the Iran and faked-up Afghanistan crisis for all they are worth in building jingoist support for his war drive against the USSR. Carter has increased the U.S. military budget for three years running and in December he announced a further hike in military spending—taking inflation into account this amounts to over one *trillion* dollars to be added to the war budget in the next five years. Most of this is to pay for a "rapid deployment force" and new ships which the Pentagon has had on its shopping list

for years.

Each escalation in American armament was palmed off as appeasing opponents of SALT. Clearly "Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty" means billions for more nuclear missiles, bombers, ships, etc. And these weapons are not being built to liberate hostages held by Islamic "students" chanting, "Carter is a dog." They are aimed at the USSR. With the Soviet army operation in Afghanistan, all the claptrap about "détente," SALT, etc.—by which the imperialists seek to negotiate the disarmament of the Soviet degenerated workers state—has been put into mothballs.

Of course, this counterrevolutionary diplomatic farce would not have gotten this far were it not for the class-collaborationist, pacifistic illusions of the Kremlin bureaucracy in "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism. But even as hamhanded intransigence by employers sometimes forces even conservative union hacks to call a strike, so the septuagenarian Stalinist leaders in Moscow got fed up and did the obvious thing. Recognizing that (as American analysts have long admitted) Afghanistan has no strategic importance for the U.S., the Soviets took the opportunity to shore up the secular left-nationalists in Kabul and in the process extended their defense perimeter by several hundred miles around the eastern flank of Iran. As for SALT, it was obviously dead and only the impotent and frustrated Jimmy Carter could see "withdrawing" it from Senate consideration as a "warning" to Moscow.

Compared to twenty years ago, however, the United States' world position is greatly weakened and the role of its imperialist allies is much greater. The end of unquestioned U.S. imperialist hegemony was marked by Nixon's 15 August 1971 action severing the dollar's relation to gold—the basis for the post-war monetary system. Now Carter meets indifference to his calls for economic boycotts of Iran and the Soviet Union. The French turned down U.S. requests to curb advanced computer exports to Moscow and the Japanese are continuing with their multi-billion dollar project to develop Siberian natural gas. The most Carter could come up with was German diplomatic support and an agreement by major grain exporters not to increase their sales to the USSR. On Iran, they're willing to vote with the U.S. in the United Nations, but no one is willing to jeopardize the vital crude oil supplies for the sake of the hostages. Turkish Foreign Minister Hayrettin Erkmen put it most clearly: "Not approving of some action by a country is not the same as announcing that that country is your enemy." Even Pakistani despot Zia is queasy, terming Carter's 400 million dollar aid offer "peanuts."

Only the Chinese appeared willing to go all the way for what that's worth. Revising its earlier "public" verdict on Deng's attack on Hanoi last year, the U.S. now concludes that "the Chinese were bloodied by the more experienced Vietnamese armed with modern Soviet weapons" (*New York Times*, 17 January). Pentagon officials conservatively estimate that to bring Peking forces to the point that they could threaten anyone would cost at least 35 billion dollars.

Carter's call for preparations to reimpose the draft in the U.S. reflect the current problems which the U.S. is having with its allies—the lack of a united response to the Soviet Union. Thus the *Sunday Times* [London] reports:

"Unquestionably the US could now blockade the [Persian] Gulf and sow enough mines to bottle up the Iranian navy and any Soviet ships using their Iraqi ports. But beyond that, Carter's options are limited. Without the use of Portugal's Azores airstrips, heavy armour would have to come from the States with five in-flight refuellings and even then might have nowhere to land.

"Efforts to open up new 'facilities' have run in to opposition, as in Somalia, Kenya and Saudi Arabia, or hesitation, as in Oman.... And the Rapid Deployment Force.... will take five years to prepare."

—20 January

When the Soviets felt the hot breath of counterrevolution next door, the Kremlin was not seized by rotten liberalism. The treatment of the pro-imperialist "dissidents" may force some governments to make hard choices between continued cooperation with the Soviet Union and lining up behind Carter's renewed Cold War. Thus the exiling of Russian physicist Andrei Sakharov caused the president of the French National Assembly, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, to cut short his visit to the USSR and return to France in protest. When these dissidents called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, they were branded for what they are: *traitors* to the proletarian cause.

## Afghanistan and the Soviet Union

U.S. imperialism has tried to portray the Soviet military operation in Afghanistan as akin to its invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. In Hungary the Kremlin suppressed a working-class political revolution. In Czechoslovakia it clamped on a bureaucratic stranglehold and cut short potentially revolutionary ferment. Both invasions were neither in the interest of the international working class nor of the defense of the gains of the October Revolution. Afghanistan is entirely different.

Commanded by a parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy which has usurped political power from the Soviet workers, the lives of Red Army soldiers have often been squandered for counterrevolutionary ends: from the Sino-Soviet border war to supporting the blood-drenched, genocidal bonapartist Derg in Ethiopia. But the Red Army in Afghanistan, the Russian support to the heroic Vietnamese and the Soviet-backed Cuban defense of Angola against the U.S.-instigated South African invasion in 1975-76 are three instances since the end of World War II where Russian military action has clearly aided the liberation of the oppressed and the defense of the Soviet state against imperialism.

Afghanistan and Russia share a common border of over 1,000 miles. Like most backward regions, Afghanistan is a mosaic of peoples none of which has been able to compact a modern nation and many of which extend into the Soviet Union or other neighbouring countries. Out of an estimated population of 17 million there are more than 250,000 mullahs—a tremendous weight on the skimpy social surplus of this barren land. Some 70 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture, but two-fifths of them are landless. While 15 percent of the people are urbanized, there are only two factories in the whole country.

The enormous burden of the Islamic priest-caste in Afghanistan, as in Iran, is rooted in barbaric social institutions which are in turn conditioned by extreme economic backwardness. Marxists point out that social progress can be measured by the position of women, and what really drove the Afghan mullahs into opposition was the attempt by the Kabul regime to restrict (not even outlaw) bride price. For centuries women have been sold like chattel slaves. For most men the bride price was a lifetime's savings or a life-long debt to money lenders who charged usurious interest rates and gave the mullahs their cut in donations.

Clearly within the framework of Afghanistan alone there was no solution to national and social oppression. These questions are linked, historically as well as socially, to the fate of the Russian Revolution. The extension of the October Revolution to Afghanistan in 1921 was prevented only by the presence of British imperialism in India. And one need only look at the gains that women have made in the Soviet East to see what proletarian liberation of these pre-capitalist areas meant. The October Revolution proclaimed the full equality of women, and Bolshevik cadres in the Asian regions where the mullahs held sway struggled, often at the cost of their lives, to draw women out of enforced seclusion. Even though this work suffered with

the Stalinist political counterrevolution, nevertheless women in the Muslim areas of the USSR have vastly more social gains and real equality than in *any* bourgeois Islamic country.

Although the Stalinist bureaucracy is imbued with Great Russian chauvinism, its conduct is conditioned by the fact that Russians are a minority people within the Soviet state—albeit the predominant minority. In order to integrate the peoples of diverse national and ethnic backgrounds who make up the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy retained a democratic national heritage. In contrast, the Chinese bureaucracy can and does resort to a policy of ruthless Sinification. The contrast between the USSR and China is clearest in their shared borderlands. For example, the Mongolians living in Outer Mongolia (a Soviet satellite) do not suffer anything like the national oppression of Mongolians living in China's Inner Mongolia, before that token of regional autonomy was abolished during the "Cultural Revolution." And an estimated 200,000 Turkic speaking people from Sinkiang, seeking to escape the oppressive chauvinism of the Han Chinese, have fled to the USSR since 1961.

The Soviet regime is particularly sensitive regarding its Muslim borderlands, where it has often made the greatest efforts to grant local and national autonomy in order to maintain the loyalty of peoples related to the rest of Central Asia. Muslim peoples number 50 million in the Soviet Union and they dominate six of the 16 republics of the USSR. Notably many of the soldiers of the Soviet army units in Afghanistan are recruited from Uzbeks and Tajiks. And if "fiercely independent Afghanistan" is about to suffer such horrendous national oppression at the hands of the Soviets, why indeed can Moscow use Muslim-derived troops without fear? Obviously because they know they're better off than they would be under the Afghan mullahs or Khomeini. Reportedly one reason why the Soviet army deployed substantial forces in Afghanistan was the feeling that the Kabul regime was being too high-handed and insensitive to the problems of carrying out reforms and consolidating a centralized governmental authority in backward areas with diverse peoples and was thereby fueling the reactionary Islamic insurgency.

From a military point of view the Soviet intervention may or may not have been wise, though certainly it is deeply just to oppose the Islamic reactionary insurgents backed by imperialism. There can be no question that for revolutionaries our side in this conflict is with the Red Army. In fact, although it is surely uncalled for militarily, a natural response on the part of the world's young leftists would be an enthusiastic desire to

join an international brigade to Afghanistan to fight the CIA-connected mullahs. Most of the fake-leftists cannot see this, however—just as they cannot understand how workers are beginning to speak of particularly oppressive bosses as "ayatollahs"—because they support the analogous movement, Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution," next door in Iran.

### Defend the Soviet Union!

By giving unconditional military support to the Soviet army and PDPA Afghan forces we in no way place political confidence in the Kremlin bureaucracy or the left-nationalists in Kabul. While the Moscow Stalinists apparently presently intend to shore up the PDPA regime, and if anything limit the pace of democratic and modernizing reforms, the prolonged presence in Afghanistan of the Soviet army opens up more far-reaching possibilities. Speaking on the national and colonial question at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, Lenin foresaw that "...with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system, and through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage." Extend social gains of the October Revolution to Afghan peoples!

If Afghanistan 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 the 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 centers.

The Kremlin and its flunkies of the pro-Moscow CPs will predictably launch a "peace offensive" to "isolate the warmongers" and "revive détente." To these shibboleths we respond as James P. Cannon did to the Stalinists 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."

—*The Road to Peace*, 1951 ■

## Document 2a.2

### Afghanistan

*The following article, by John Blake, was originally published in the British Socialist Worker, 19 January 1980. In the original most sentences were separate paragraphs.*

The Russians are literally digging in for a long stay in Afghanistan. Their helicopter gunships patrol the country side. They have taken the major cities in heavy fighting with tanks and air support. They face an armed and outraged people who are united in a fight for Islam and against the foreign invader.

How did this happen? Let's go back nearly ten years, to 1971.

A small town in southern Afghanistan, on the edge of famine. The school students are on strike. A brave schoolboy

stands on an upturned box shouting 'Death to the Landlords'. A knot of cheering boys surrounds him. The peasants watch, attracted but wary of police spies. The boy is a supporter of the communists. The air is electric with fear, but nothing happens.

The boy was typical of Afghan communists. They were the products of an educational explosion funded by foreign aid. They were the children of middle peasants and small shopkeepers. They hated the big landlords, the real power in the country. They lived in a poor land of deserts and bare mountains where the landlord usually took two thirds or more of the crop. And they hated the King's despotic rule, like everybody else.

Like Bulbula, a middle aged nomad woman. They took her husband away for questioning. He was brought back dying, black all over, his stomach split open. They dropped him at her feet and told her he died of eating bad watermelon in custody.

Like the elderly peasant in the north of the country, dying in the famine. There was a mountain of foreign aid grain in the centre of the town. The merchants were selling it off, at ten times the normal price and nobody had any money. The local governor had put a ring of soldiers around the grain. A young American journalist asked why the peasants didn't just take the grain. The peasant explained simply: *'The king has airplanes. They would come and kill us.'*

The planes were donated by the Soviet Union, flown by pilots trained in Texas. Afghanistan was non-aligned. As a teacher put it: *'Sometimes we have democracy. Then they don't kill us... they only put out our eyes.'* Or, as a district officer put it: *'We have given these people democracy but they do not understand it, so we have to shoot them.'*

The communists sent people out to the small towns and villages. Then the Right organised. The mullahs told the villagers that the communists were godless free-lovers. Left and right wing students fought long battles in Kabul with guns and axes.

The Right won in the villages. Near Kabul, the villagers had elected Babrak Karmal—now President—to Parliament. They told me it was because he had been against the landlords, but when they realised he was anti-Islam they turned away from him.

## Legal

This was not surprising, for Islam has deep roots in Afghan history and society. Islam means many things in many places. But Afghan Islam above all stands for the subjection of women and resistance to imperialism.

Women are badly oppressed. It is effectively legal to kill a wife or daughter for infidelity. Women are sold to a husband for several years' wages. They work hard in the fields and at home and are much beaten, for that is every man's right. Each man covets his neighbour's wife, and each poor man lucky enough to have a wife hangs onto her desperately in the hope of children and security. Any hint of women's rights threatens what little each man has. The mullahs denounce every unveiling, all female education, all adultery as the work of the devil. What does Islam mean, I asked. The peasants told me: *'That is my dog and that is my woman.'*

Islam also means resistance. Twice in the nineteenth century the British invaded. Twice the ruling class disappeared. Twice the common people turned to Islam, the only ideology which could unite them, and drove the imperialists out in a holy war.

Then, in the 1920s, King Amanullah tried to 'modernise' the country, attacking the big landlords, unveiling women, doing nothing for the common people but taxing them. They rose again in holy war and defeated him. A conservative, British-backed king replaced him. These wars and risings are remembered. So the communists, linked to infidel Russia and her planes and tarred with the rights of women ... these known unbelievers, were driven out of the villages. Soon after, in 1973, there was a military coup led by the King's cousin. Little changed. Power still lay with the landlords.

But the communists had seen the power of the army. The officers were young men, newly educated, the product of the petty bourgeoisie, like the communists. From underground

they worked on the officers. Facing government massacre in 1978, the communists struck back with a coup. The 'April Revolution' was born. The surprised Russians had to support it.

Taraki's new government moved against the landlords. They decreed that they would give their land to small farmers. They decreed that bride-price was abolished, that rural debt was cancelled. The stuff of a real revolution. But this revolution was won by mobilising the petty bourgeoisie, not the peasants, or the minuscule working class. And the people began to move against the government.

The lords wanted to hold their land and power. The mullahs fought against the infidel. The people fought for Islam, against imperialism, for their control over their women.

## Soldier

The revolt was fragmented, spontaneous, tribe by tribe, valley by valley. It was a guerrilla war—shoot a soldier here, a Russian there. But it made it impossible for the government to carry out the land reform which was its only hope of winning over the peasants.

The government had to fall back on Russia, on Russian money and advisors. And Russian-flown planes strafing the people just like the King's planes. Repression intensified as the government swung 'left'. That produced more dissidence. Some soldiers mutinied, some deserted.

The rebels held 20 of the 26 provinces. The Russians panicked. The invasion was not for 'strategic' reasons, but because of the Central Asian Muslims who form a third of the Soviet populations. They share their languages with the Northern Afghans and if they saw a communist regime fall to popular insurgency in muslim Afghanistan, they would know the days of Soviet tyranny were numbered.

So the Russians moved in, shot the 'left' communist President Amin, and replaced him with the 'right' communist Babrak Karmal. They hope Karmal will placate the Afghans with gestures to Islam and a halt to reforms, while they break the back of the resistance.

Their 'strategy' has the same chance as a snowball in hell. Afghanistan is ideal guerrilla terrain. The US and China will pour in aid to the guerrillas through Pakistan. The rebels are dirt-poor, bitter proud, the lucky among them now underfed refugees in Pakistan. They are ready for a long war, and they will bleed the Russians of men and money. This is Russia's Vietnam.

So where do we, as socialists, stand? Clearly, against the Russian invasion. They have set the cause of socialism in Afghanistan back generations. It is the tragedy of the Afghan communists that they tried to build socialism behind the backs of the people when it was too difficult to build it among them. They are reaping the consequences, prisoners of helicopter gunship socialism. It is the tragedy of that schoolboy orator.

Do we back the rebels? No. They are a mass popular movement, but they were not created by the Russian invasion. They are a movement against communism, against unbelievers, against land reform, against the emancipation of women.

It is the tragedy of the Afghan people that poverty, oppression and imperialism have produced a form of right wing 'Islamic' politics. For socialists it is an awful lesson against making a revolution over the heads of the people. It is a time for mourning for lost hopes and the horrors to come: the refugee camps, the napalm, the famines, the dead children.

No good will come of the Russian invasion, but many tears will flow. ■

## Document 2a.3

### *Afghanistan: Russia defeated as....* **US Abandons the Victims**

*Reprinted from Socialist Worker (Britain), 11 February 1989. This article represents a shift from the ostensible neutrality of document 2a.2 with its assessment of the victory of imperialist-backed reactionaries as "a boost for our side" and the comparison with Vietnam. In the original most sentences were separate paragraphs.*

Russia's war in Afghanistan appears over. The invasion that Moscow now calls a "political mistake" has ended in defeat. Russia intervened more than nine years ago to prop up a government which now looks incapable of surviving. Russian Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's last desperate attempts to preserve some members of the Najibullah government in an interim administration have floundered. *mujahedin* leaders based in Pakistan have refused to have any truck with the ruling party, the PDPA.

The defeat for the USSR is profound. Former leader Brezhnev ordered the invasion in late 1979 to protect Russian's interests in Afghanistan and maintain a friendly state on its border. Now Gorbachev has been forced out by the popular resistance. The attempt to subjugate the country by force has been broken.

#### **Fuelled**

Far from subduing fundamentalism, Islamic influence will have been fuelled immeasurably by this victory. Opponents of Russia's rule everywhere within the USSR and Eastern Europe will take enormous heart. But the legacy of the war and of decades of imperialist interference—not just by Russia but by Britain and the United States—is vast. The fighting is likely to continue.

Attempts to set up an interim government at a consultative assembly (*shura*) this week looked doomed. The *mujahedin* is split between the commanders in the field and the political leaders in Pakistan and Iran. The political parties are split be-

tween allegiance to Pakistan and to Iran—to Sunni or Shi'ite Islam.

The seven parties based in Pakistan are divided between those wanting a fundamentalist state and others backing a return of the king Zaheer Shah, deposed in 1973. The one unifying factor has departed—opposition to the Russian army. Neighbouring Islamic states Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia are competing to fill the vacuum left by the USSR.

No one is concerned to aid the people ravaged by the war. More than one million of Afghanistan's 15 million people have died. Two thirds of the population are refugees. The population of beleaguered Kabul has quadrupled and now hundreds of thousands face famine in a country that used to be self-sufficient in food. Tens of millions of mines and plastic bombs litter the deserted countryside. More than half the livestock has been slaughtered. Wells and irrigation channels lie in ruins.

Pakistan and Iran want rid of the millions of refugees inside their borders. Russia's rulers want only to minimise the damage to their interests. The United States and Britain are refusing to help a United Nations relief effort, claiming it will prolong the life of the Russian-backed Najibullah government. So while the White House has been spending \$600 million a year on arms for the *mujahedin*, it has given just \$16 million in aid to the UN and a further \$95 million to "private" relief agencies. With the Russian army gone, the US cares little for the *mujahedin*.

That shouldn't lead socialists to see Russia's defeat as anything but a boost for our side. Russia's experience in Afghanistan resembles that of the US in Vietnam in everything from the effect on its forces' morale—its troops bartering uniforms and arms for hashish—to the extent of the defeat.

It took the Pentagon years even to begin to recover. If anything, the consequences for Russia's rulers could be more grave. ■

## Document 2a.4

### **United Secretariat Declaration on Afghanistan**

*Reprinted from Intercontinental Press, 3 March 1980. We have excerpted key passages from the 26 January 1980 majority resolution passed by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) led by the late Ernest Mandel. There were also two minority resolutions (see document 2a.5).*

5. In a society like that in Afghanistan, the initiation of progressive reforms by the PDPA was bound to arouse armed resistance from those conservative forces who lived off the exploitation and oppression of the toiling masses and who had previously presided unchallenged over the destinies of one of the most deprived people on earth.

Notwithstanding the petty-bourgeois character of the PDPA leadership, its desire to carry through a "national and democratic revolution," and its methods of carrying out its reform program, the existence of two camps confronting each other in a civil war that has spread since the spring of

1979 expresses the sharp confrontation between the exploited and oppressed classes and the ruling classes.

A coalition of reactionary forces whose real social base was composed of big landowners, tribal chiefs, smugglers, the religious hierarchy, and industrial and commercial capitalists rose up against the new regime. The traditional tribal, clan, and semifeudal ties of dependence between the peasants and the notables made it easier for the latter to build a social base. Islam was employed as an ideological glue to cement these various layers. The fragmented character of the conservative groups fighting against the regime in reality reflects their organization around the tribal chiefs and notables of diverse regions.

American imperialism then moved—with the aid of the European imperialists—to strengthen its position in the region, including Pakistan. Its direct and indirect aid to the reactionary forces in Afghanistan was part of this broader oper-

ation and in turn highlighted the class nature of the civil war unfolding within Afghanistan.

6. The Soviet bureaucracy is concerned, above all, with protecting its own power and interests. It therefore places great importance not only on the military defense of the Soviet Union's borders, but also, within the context of its policy of peaceful coexistence, on regional stability.

Faced with the danger of a collapse of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and a possible victory by the reactionary forces linked to imperialism, Moscow decided to become more deeply involved. It was not prepared to accept the installation of a regime beholden to imperialism on its borders and in a country that had traditionally been under its influence, with all the consequences that would follow, especially at a time of heightening tensions throughout the region. Moscow did not look forward to the prospect of a chaotic situation of prolonged and spreading civil war. It feared the establishment of another "Islamic Republic" and its repercussions on those populations in the Soviet Union whose ethnic and cultural identities are similar to those of peoples in Afghanistan and Iran.

Beginning on December 24, 1979, the Soviet Union qualitatively increased its military presence in Afghanistan, after having prepared the liquidation of Amin and his replacement by Babrak Karmal.

7. The Soviet bureaucracy decided to intervene (which was only part of its broader policy) the same way it decides all questions—without any regard for the democratic and national sentiments of the oppressed classes and peoples or for whether the working class on a world scale will understand it.

Independently of its specific aims, however, the Soviet bureaucracy's intervention places it in a position where it must fight against a reactionary social bloc, a bloc that has no resemblance to a "national liberation movement," but which is struggling to retain its privileges and turn back all the gains of the masses.

Whatever our political opposition to the bureaucracy's overall approach, we must not lose sight of the concrete and important fact that today the bureaucracy is striking—with its own methods—against the counterrevolution. It is dealing a military setback to reaction and imperialism within the country.

Given Afghanistan's position on the Soviet Union's borders and the Soviet intervention in the civil war, the class struggle unfolding in that country immediately takes on an international dimension and is reflected in the current conflict between imperialism and the Soviet Union.

Imperialism, under the guise of preserving "national sovereignty," has acted to defend the landlords and the privi-

leged classes, to break the rise of a liberation movement of the workers and peasants, and to change the strategic situation to the detriment of the Soviet Union.

9. a. Revolutionary Marxists support the anti-imperialist demands of the Afghan workers and peasants and the progressive measures taken in their interests by the PDPA. In the civil war under way in Afghanistan—regardless of their criticisms of the policies of the PDPA leadership and the Kremlin—they are in the camp of the toiling masses and fight for their victory over the conservative forces and their imperialist allies.

b. Revolutionists base themselves on the international class struggle and on the independent organization of the workers and peasants, which is totally different from the entire approach of the Kremlin bureaucracy.

They do not take any responsibility for the Kremlin's military intervention. They do not give the slightest political support to this intervention, which flows from the overall policy of the bureaucratic caste. Although the intervention deals blows to the reactionary forces, it does not in the least aim to improve the opportunities for independent action by the masses.

Revolutionary Marxists reject any neutralist attitude in this war. In so far as the Soviet army actually is opposing the enemies of the workers and peasants, they favor its victory over them. To achieve that, the gains of the workers must be consolidated, radical social and democratic steps must be taken, and the Afghan masses must be organized and armed to defend them.

d. In the conflict between the reactionary coalition and imperialism on one side and the Soviet troops and the PDPA government on the other, the demand for Afghan national sovereignty in the name of the right of peoples to self-determination would be nothing but a democratic guise for the aims of reaction and imperialism. The withdrawal of the Soviet troops would in no way assure any freedom for the Afghan nationalities to decide their own course. It would only open the way for the installation of a reactionary regime oppressing workers and peasants, a regime beholden to Washington, which would consolidate Washington's position in the region.

e. To choose the camp opposed to imperialism and the reactionary forces does not imply any truce or holy alliance with the Soviet bureaucracy, whose counterrevolutionary orientation discredits socialism, places a major obstacle before the development of the world revolution, and thus weakens the defense of the material basis of the Soviet workers state.

## Document 2a.5

### The Fourth International and Afghanistan

*By Salah Jaber, reprinted from International Viewpoint, 6 April 1987. Footnotes as per original text. Note the claim that calling for a Soviet withdrawal, which the Usec's 1980 resolution had correctly observed would "open the way" for the installation of a reactionary regime, does not amount to support for the mujahedin.*

In January 1980, a month after the start of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International met. A minority supported the Soviet interven-

tion, characterizing it as "progressive." The majority of the United Secretariat criticized the intervention, but rejected the call for withdrawal of the Soviet troops, supporting them against the *mujahedin*. It called for "choosing your camp against imperialist and the conservative forces." Only a small minority came out for withdrawal.<sup>1</sup>

The supporters of withdrawal, however, explained their position on the basis of considerations on the class nature of the camps existing in Afghanistan identical to those that in-

spired the two other positions. Their minority resolution, after condemning the Soviet intervention as a “gross violation of the right of peoples to self-determination,” argued as follows:

“A prolonged presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan can only fuel the following tendencies:

“The tendency that the Afghan rebellion will increase in strength and popularity, profiting from the national Afghan resentment against Soviet intervention and from imperialist support using this intervention as a pretext. The Kremlin is in the process of getting bogged down in a war that it can never complete, inasmuch as it is completely illusory to wipe out guerrilla forces in a mountainous country when they have in addition two bases of support at their disposal—Pakistan and Iran.”

The minority resolution concluded with the definition of tasks:

“Revolutionary Marxists must take part in and promote actions by the anti-imperialist and workers’ movement to bring political pressure to bear on the Soviet Union to immediately withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. In doing this, they must oppose all characterization of the Soviet Union as imperialist. They must also fulfill their duty of solidarity with the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist Afghan forces, explaining that the demand for the withdrawal of Soviet troops should in no way be confused with support for the *mujahedin*.”

This is the position that was finally adopted in May 1981 by a majority of the International Executive Committee of the International.<sup>2</sup> While a minority continued to uphold the United Secretariat position of January 1980, the majority of the IEC adopted and developed, with certain nuances of its own, the argumentation of the pro-withdrawal minority of 1980. Thus, the May 1981 resolution placed itself within the framework of “combating all the forces of reaction, the Islamic fundamental movements and others in Peshawar,” and judged that the Soviet intervention “favors the counter-revolution.”

While affirming that “real defence of the interests of the workers and peasants, as well as of the peoples of Afghanistan, involves an intransigent struggle against the Afghan re-

actionary forces and imperialism,” the majority resolution of the IEC declared for the “right of self-determination of the Afghan peoples” and for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, pointing out that this slogan “is in no way opposed to an unconditional defence of the members and sympathizers of the PDPA against the reaction.”

The resolution ended by defining the following tasks:

“Revolutionary Marxists will campaign to expose the hypocrisy of imperialism, which, while claiming to be ‘the defender of the freedom of the Afghan people,’ gives its support to the reactionary forces.... They oppose any imperialist intervention in the region. For support to the workers and peasants and organizations that are fighting against the reaction and against Soviet repression.<sup>3</sup> For defence of the right of the Afghan peoples to self-determination and for the political sovereignty of Afghanistan.”

It is useful in particular to recall what was, and remains, the position of the Fourth International on Afghanistan, because many people still confuse calling clearly for withdrawal of the Soviet troops with an attitude of support for the *mujahedin*, or even with putting pressure on the imperialist countries to increase their aid to the world’s richest reactionary guerrillas.

#### [Footnotes]

1. The majority and minority resolutions were published in *Intercontinental Press*, Vol. 18, No. 8, March 3, 1980.

2. The resolutions of the 1981 IEC were published in *Inprecor* (French-language), No. 69, July 6, 1981.

3. There were a few Afghan organizations of Maoist inspiration that were both “progressive” and opposed to the Soviet presence. While it was correct to note their existence as a positive fact, it was wrong to think that they “could become a pole of active opposition to the Islamic fundamentalist or pro-imperialist forces.” That was to underestimate the formidable polarization of Afghan society produced by the Soviet intervention and the military escalation. Those of the autonomous Afghan progressives who have not gone over to the Kabul government, or one of the Islamic parties have been decimated by the *mujahedin* as much, if not more, than by the PDPA’s repression. ■

## PART 2B: ON "HAILING" STALINIST AFGHAN POLICY

### Document 2b.1

#### BT Says Don't Hail Red Army in Afghanistan

*Reprinted from Workers Vanguard No. 449 (25 March 1988)*

... or anywhere else. Looking down the barrel of Cold War II, the crew of sour ex-members who now make up the "Bolshevik Tendency," formerly External Tendency, fled the Spartacist League. They found our forthright Soviet defensism too hot to handle. As we pointed out in "The 'External Tendency': From Cream Puffs to Food Poisoning" (WV No. 349, 2 March 1984): "If the ET were more honest, they would admit that they hated it when we hailed the Soviet Red Army's military intervention in Afghanistan." "Not true" carped the ET/BT, who at the time were ever so modestly posturing as the sole repository of authentic Spartacism against the supposed "degeneration" of the organization they quit. "We do hail the Red Army's intervention against the barbaric Afghan reactionaries," they said in the May 1984 "Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt."

But claiming to stand on the red side in Afghanistan doesn't go down well in the anti-Soviet swamp in which the BT mingles. Not that anyone ever took their purported politics seriously (to wit, the BT was never excluded from any of the pop-front meetings or mobilizations for its proclaimed Soviet defensism, in contrast to the treatment we've been handed). Nonetheless even the pretense of defending the Red Army intervention in Afghanistan has become an obvious encumbrance to the BT's appetites to share the sheets with the rad-libs and social democrats. Now the cards are on the table.

At a March 5 public forum of the Trotskyist League of Canada [TLC] entitled "Finish Off CIA's Afghan Warriors!" Tom Riley, leading light of the Canadian BT, gave full vent to what has always been their deeply felt position. On the occasion of a meeting to celebrate International Women's Day, in particular in defense of Afghan women against the inevitable bloodbath that will come if the Soviets pull out, Riley declared: "Trotskyists never hail Stalinist traitors or their state.... The slogan 'Hail Red Army' is not a Trotskyist slogan, because what it tells workers is to trust the Stalinists, put your faith in the Stalinists, hail the Stalinists. It disappears the political treachery of Gorbachev and the other parasites he represents...." So what about the Red Army's heroic struggle to crush Hitlerite Nazism—just "Stalinist treachery"?

What the BT "disappears" is the contradictory character of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The line of "Stalinism is counter-revolutionary through and through and to the core," a more concise and eloquent expression of the BT position, first appeared as a one-sided formulation during the Socialist Workers Party's 1952-53 internal struggle against the pro-Stalinist Cochran-Clarke liquidators (Joseph Hansen repeatedly defended this formulation in internal documents). But who in the USSR could really fit this description? Only a native Russian *Pamyat* fascist, or a CIA "mole" in the KGB. In fact, in the *Transitional Program* Trotsky described the con-

tradictory nature of the bureaucracy: "all shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F. Butenko)." But Riley & Co. do not want to know these things; they prefer the image of soul-destroying, monolithic Stalinist totalitarianism.

According to Riley: "It's not possible to make a meaningful distinction in the Marxist sense between an army and the state which controls it, in this case a degenerated workers state. The state is an armed body of men defending a particular set of property forms." But the property forms in the Soviet Union are, despite its Stalinist degeneration, proletarian. Riley's syllogism is hardly original. In arguing against defense of the Soviet Union at the start of World War II, Max Shachtman, leader of the petty-bourgeois opposition within the SWP, wrote: "We have never supported the Kremlin's international policy... but what is war? War is the continuation of politics by other means. Then why should we support the war which is the continuation of the international policy which we did not and do not support?" Trotsky replied: "we are presented here with a rounded-out theory of *defeatism*.... Then why not say it?" Shachtman the doubting soon became Shachtman the confirmed Third Camp Soviet-defeatist, claiming that the Soviet Union was ruled by a new "bureaucratic collectivist" class. For years, the ET denied being Shachtmanite because they still endorsed "Hail Red Army." What next for the BT?

The Red Army intervention in Afghanistan was a defense of these property forms against a counterrevolutionary, imperialist-sponsored Islamic insurgency on the Soviet Union's crucial southern flank. Moreover, the Soviet intervention offered the possibility of extending the gains of the October Revolution to the hideously oppressed Afghan peoples. But that was never the intention of the Kremlin, for it goes against the grain of the reactionary dogma of "socialism in one country." *The Stalinists never hailed the Red Army in Afghanistan, only the Trotskyist Spartacist tendency did.*

As comrade Trotsky put it in the 1939-40 fight against Shachtman/Burnham's opposition to the defense of the Soviet Union in the Socialist Workers Party, "in the final analysis, through the interests of the bureaucracy, in a very distorted form the interests of the workers' state are reflected. These interests we defend—with our own methods" ("From a Scratch to the Danger of Gangrene," *In Defense of Marxism*).

In our 1984 article on the External Tendency, we noted that "These characters logically would fit right in with the Weinsteinists, late of the Socialist Workers Party, behind whom stands the lure of America's 'mainstream' social democrats, the Democratic Socialists." Now the BT has qualitatively accelerated their march on this course. The most chemically pure rendition was translated on "Canadian soil," long dear to Tom Riley. On February 2, the BT hooked up with the Alli-

ance for Socialist Action (the latest incarnation of Canadian Mandelism) to initiate a popular-front demo over Central America around the sole demand "Oppose U.S. Contra Aid!"

A BT letter [reprinted below as an appendix to Document 2b.2], complaining that the TLC refused to join in peddling this as a "single issue" slogan for a "united front," read like an SWP textbook defense of its "Out Now" slogan during the Vietnam War. The SWP argued that its "antiwar coalitions" were not pop-frontist because they were built on this "single issue" (although it soon became the rallying cry of bourgeois defeatism once the more farsighted elements of the ruling class realized that the U.S. wasn't going to win). The BT wrote: "there were no bourgeois participants in the 2 February demonstration—but your position seems to be that it was 'unprincipled' because there hypothetically *could* have been."

Hypothetically?! Opposition to U.S. contra aid is the on-again, off-again position of a hefty chunk of the war-mongering Democratic Party in the U.S. itself. But in Canada this line sells at really bargain basement prices. Indeed, Tory prime minister Brian Mulroney could have marched under this banner. He opposes "U.S. contra aid" as well (as has the bourgeoisie of virtually every other imperialist country from the get-go). Where Reagan boosts the loser contras, the Cana-

dian imperialists propose instead to send "peacekeeping" troops to Central America to hold the line against "Communism." The key to fighting the imperialist war moves is to *defend Nicaragua* by united *working-class* action.

But that would be beyond the pale, because it would mean facing the question of revolution. Ingratiating themselves with the Mandelite surrogates of Canadian social democracy, the BT wasn't about to oppose their "own" ruling class. Indeed, even the BT's *own* placards, chants and speech at the demo contained not so much as a hint of Soviet defensism in Nicaragua. Nor, for that matter, will one find any call for defense of the Soviet Union today in their articles in 1917 on Central America, Poland and Gorbachev—and that takes conscious effort!

So the BT is preparing to set up its tent in the Third Camp. In light of their whole trajectory, this was quite predictable. But some questions remain. Why does the BT continue to claim in its press that it upholds long-standing principles of the Spartacist League in flat contradiction to its political appetites and sought-for political allies? And why does it have a nasty tendency to create provocative incidents in our presence and then howl about it? Or as we headlined in WV, "Garbage Doesn't Walk By Itself, What Makes BT Run?" ■

## Document 2b.2

### Bolshevik Tendency reply to *Workers Vanguard* No. 449

*The following letter, dated 8 April 1988, was written in response to Document 2b.1*

Comrades:

In reading your latest anti-BT screed (*Workers Vanguard* No. 449, 25 March) we are reminded of James P. Cannon's complaint that "Lenin said: 'It is very hard to find a conscientious opponent.' That was in Russia. In America it is impossible." Plus ça change...

No one reading your piece would have any idea that what you are polemicizing against is our decision to adopt the slogan "Military Victory to the Soviet Army in Afghanistan" in place of "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan." Your polemic is deliberately intended to convey the impression that we are changing sides in Afghan conflict—rather than changing the formulation expressing our military support to the Soviets and their allies.

You quote bits of comrade Tom Riley's intervention at your 5 March forum in Toronto, but carefully edit out the clear and unambiguous reiteration of Soviet defensism which formed the framework for his remarks. Of course, had you accurately reported the content of his intervention, it would have completely disproved your conclusion that the BT is "preparing to set up its tent in the Third Camp."

As cde. Riley pointed out, "Trotskyists never hail Stalinist traitors or their state" because doing so obscures the treacherous and anti-revolutionary character of Stalinism. The intervention of the Soviet army in Afghanistan was historically progressive inasmuch as it contributed to the defense of the USSR. It also represented a possibility of significant social progress for the Afghan masses—particularly women. Trotskyists are not indifferent to this. The reason that it was a mistake to "hail" Brezhnev's army in Afghanistan—while at the same time necessary to defend it militarily—is because it possessed at every moment the capacity to betray the Afghan women, workers and leftists who placed their faith in it.

The SL's stunted branch in Toronto, which styles itself the "Trotskyist League of Canada," gave your Afghanistan line its crudest expression when they marched in an International Women's Day demonstration on 5 March, proudly holding aloft a banner with giant letters a foot high proclaiming "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" The fine print at the top of the banner qualified this slightly with an observation to the effect that a "Red Army Withdrawal Would Mean Horrible Bloodbath." Comrade Riley's intervention at the TLC forum that night pointed out the obvious absurdity of "hailing" an army which was on the verge of setting up a "horrible bloodbath." He explained that the Stalinists' evident willingness to betray the Afghan women and leftists who had trusted them was proof that the SL's "hail" formula had been flawed *from the beginning*. On the demonstration earlier in the day, the TLC members chanted, "Down with Khomeini in Iran—Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" The BT contingent counterposed, "Down with Khomeini in Iran—Oppose Gorbachev's Sell-Out in Afghanistan!" This slogan the TLCers idiotically denounced as "Shachtmanite!"

You rhetorically ask whether the Soviet army's struggle against the Nazis was "just 'Stalinist treachery'." Perhaps you think that the Trotskyists should have been "hailing" the Stalinist apparatus in that struggle as well? Trotsky thought differently:

"During the military struggle against Hitler, the revolutionary workers will strive to enter into the closest possible comradesly relations with the rank-and-file fighters of the Red Army. While arms in hand they deal blows to Hitler, the Bolshevik-Leninists will at the same time conduct revolutionary propaganda against Stalin preparing his overthrow at the next and perhaps very near stage.

"...Our defense of the USSR is carried on under the slogan: 'For Socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!'"

—*In Defense of Marxism*, p. 20

Far from “hailing” the Stalinist military apparatus, as you propose, Trotsky proposed to combine military defense of the property forms with preparations for the political revolution *against* the bureaucracy. This is how Trotskyists defend the Soviet Union.

Your polemic contains one of the subterfuges which you used in 1983 to defend your decision to call yourselves the Yuri Andropov Brigade, after the Stalinist hatchet man who played a key role in the counterrevolutionary suppression of the Hungarian workers uprising of 1956. Unable to attack our Soviet defensist position then or now, in both cases you clumsily ascribe to us a position which you know we do not hold—i.e., “Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through and to the core” and then flail away at the straw man you created. Who do you hope to fool with such shoddy debaters’ tricks?

Your assertion that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan “goes against the grain” of “socialism in one country” is, on its face, simply stupid. Was Stalin “going against the grain” of Stalinism when he intervened in Finland in 1939? Or when he decided to expropriate the East European bourgeoisie after the war? Of course not. On another level though this formulation is perhaps not so accidental. Those who despair of the historic possibility of the working class, led by a conscious Trotskyist vanguard, intervening to change the world have often in the past looked to one or another alternative agency for social progress. This is the political significance of your inclination to “hail” the Stalinist bureaucracy and identify yourselves with Andropov et al.

However, as we have pointed out before, the most dramatic

## Appendix

*Bolshevik Tendency letter to the Trotskyist League, 4 February 1988*

Comrades:

On 2 February the recently reconstituted Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (TAIC), sponsored a demonstration to “Oppose U.S. Contra Aid!” which drew almost 300 participants. Unlike other “anti-interventionist” demonstrations held in this city in the past few years, this was organized as a genuine united front with a simple one-slogan summons to the streets. All who opposed U.S. contra aid were welcome to join in, carry their own banners, and chant their own slogans. On Saturday 23 January and again at your public class on 26 January, you were approached by a supporter of the Alliance for Socialist Action and specifically invited to participate in building the demonstration and guaranteed the opportunity to have your own speaker at it. Your refusal to either endorse or participate in the demonstration confirms our characterization of the Trotskyist League as a sterile, introverted, non-revolutionary sect.

It seems you think something is wrong with the slogan “Oppose U.S. Contra Aid.” At your public class you attempted to justify your non-involvement by saying that the demonstration was popular-frontist because the Democratic Party opposed contra funding! In fact the Democrats support continued funding to the contras — they just oppose Reagan’s inflexible tactics toward the Sandinistas. As a supplementary proof of the “popular frontist” character of the demonstration Trotskyist League comrades pointed out that the basis of unity included neither a call for military victory to the FMLN in El Salvador nor for the defense of the Soviet Union. Why stop there? The following correct positions were also not included in the basis of unity for the demonstration: 1) the right of self-determination for the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka; 2) the necessity for the rebirth of the Fourth Interna-

vidence of the political demoralization of the ex-Trotskyist leadership of the Spartacist group is its fixation on acquiring various material assets—particularly real estate. When this conflicts with the militant phrase-spouting and/or adulation of Stalinists there is no question which has precedence. The SL’s cowardly flinch on saving the U.S. Marines in Lebanon in 1983; its denial of the Soviets’ right to defend their airspace at the height of the KAL 007 flap; and its characterization of the loss of a handful of Star Warriors aboard the U.S. spy shuttle “Challenger” in 1986 as “tragic,” are all evidence of this.

In view of your apparent interest in the implications of the correction in our formulation of Soviet defensism in Afghanistan, and your insistence that those who refuse to “hail” the Stalinists are headed for the Third Camp, we propose a public debate on the question—in either New York or Toronto—at the earliest mutually convenient date. Unlike the Toronto forum in March, where we were permitted only a *single* speaker for three minutes, a public debate would permit a thorough airing of the relative merits of our respective slogans: “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” vs. “Military Victory to Soviet Army in Afghanistan!”

Given your politically cowardly record of refusing to debate us in the past we are not anticipating a positive response to this challenge. Still, you did publish a retraction of your earlier erroneous report that we had participated in your exclusion from a San Francisco Palestinian demonstration (WV No. 446, 12 February), so perhaps you will once again surprise us.

We look forward to your reply.

Faternally,

Cathy Nason for the Bolshevik Tendency

tional. No doubt you can think of a few more.

Your conception of what a united front should be is radically different than Trotsky’s. He ridiculed the idea that a united front should be organized around one’s own full program. His polemics against the idiocy of Third Period Stalinism with its proposals for a “united front” with the reformists on the Stalinist program are entirely applicable (with all proportions guarded) to the farcical ultimatism of the TL toward the TAIC:

“If one accepts the theory that every type of the united front, except the Communist, is ‘counterrevolutionary,’ then obviously the British proletariat must put off its revolutionary struggle until that time when the Communist Party is able to come to the fore. But the Communist Party cannot come to the front of the class except on the basis of its own revolutionary experience. However, its experience cannot take on a revolutionary character in any other way than by drawing mass millions into the struggle. Yet non-Communist masses, the more so if organized, cannot be drawn into the struggle except through the policy of the united front. We fall into a vicious circle, from which there is no way out by means of bureaucratic ultimatism.”

—“What Next?”, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.169

In its own inimitable comic-opera fashion the “Trotskyist” League mimics the bureaucratic ultimatism of the Stalinist Third Period, complete with references to participants in such demonstrations as “squeezed lemons.” The stupidity of the TL’s position is manifest in the fact that, according to your leading political spokesperson in Toronto, cde. Masters, you “of course” oppose contra aid. There is, consequently, no rational reason for you to abstain from a demonstration organized on such a basis which guarantees full freedom of criticism for all participants.

We remind you of the words of Joseph Seymour: “A united

front is essentially a common action characteristically around concrete, usually negative, demands on bourgeois authority.” Seymour’s document, “On the United Front Question,” which dates from the period when the Spartacist tendency was still Trotskyist, first appeared in an internal bulletin in 1974. It was written to refute a notion which had “permeated our ranks that while a united front with bourgeois forces was permissible to defend democratic rights, it was impermissible over issues central to the class struggle (e.g. opposition to an

imperialist war).” In fact there were no bourgeois participants in the 2 February demonstration—but your position seems to be that it was “unprincipled” because there hypothetically *could* have been. As a friendly suggestion to those comrades of the TL who can still think, we propose that they read Seymour’s article and consider their abstentionism in its light.

Fraternally,  
Ken Williams for the Bolshevik Tendency

## Document 2b.3

### BT Protests Too Much

Workers Vanguard No. 453 (20 May 1988) published the following truncated version of Document 2b.2

[WV Introduction] We print below excerpts of a letter by the “Bolshevik Tendency” (ex-External Tendency) in response to our article, “BT Says Don’t Hail Red Army in Afghanistan” (see WV No. 449, 25 March).

Toronto, Canada  
8 April 1988  
Workers Vanguard  
New York, NY  
Comrades:

No one reading your piece would have any idea that what you are polemicizing against is our decision to adopt the slogan “Military Victory to the Soviet Army in Afghanistan” in place of “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan.” Your polemic is deliberately intended to convey the impression that we are changing sides in Afghan conflict—rather than changing the formulation expressing our military support to the Soviets and their allies.

As cde. Riley pointed out, “Trotskyists never hail Stalinist traitors or their state” because doing so obscures the treacherous and anti-revolutionary character of Stalinism. The intervention of the Soviet army in Afghanistan was historically progressive inasmuch as it contributed to the defense of the USSR. It also represented a possibility of significant social progress for the Afghan masses—particularly women. Trotskyists are not indifferent to this. The reason that it was a mistake to “hail” Brezhnev’s army in Afghanistan—while at the same time necessary to defend it militarily—is because it possessed at every moment the capacity to betray the Afghan women, workers and leftists who placed their faith in it.

You rhetorically ask whether the Soviet army’s struggle against the Nazis was “just Stalinist treachery.” Perhaps you think that the Trotskyists should have been “hailing” the Stalinist apparatus in that struggle as well?... Far from “hailing” the Stalinist military apparatus, as you propose, Trotsky advocated combining military defense of the property forms with preparations for the political revolution *against* the bureaucracy. This is how Trotskyists defend the Soviet Union.

Fraternally,  
Cathy Nason for the Bolshevik Tendency

**WV replies:** So you say you’re for “Military Victory to the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.” You’re even “not indifferent” to the fact that the Soviet Army intervention meant social progress to Afghan women—like literacy and removing the veil. How very big of you, especially since for the last six years you’ve remained conspicuously closemouthed on Afghanistan. But what does it mean to call for “military victory” now, precisely when Gorbachev & Co. are pulling the Soviet

troops out? It’s an empty statement to try to cover the fact that you’re openly renouncing the Spartacist slogan, “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!”

We always said if the BT/ET were honest, they’d admit they hated that forthright stand, which was reviled in the rad-lib milieu caught up in Jimmy Carter’s “human rights” crusade, the “moral rearmament” phase of the post-Vietnam anti-Soviet war drive. So now the BT has finally come out with it, but they’re still trying to weasel. As we pointed out in WV 449, they’re paying the admission price to crawl into the all-Canada popular front: no “soft-on-Russia” pinkos allowed.

But the BT’s letter does have the virtue of putting it baldly. “Trotskyists never hail Stalinist traitors or their state,” they say, “because doing so obscures the treacherous and anti-revolutionary character of Stalinism.” And they wonder why we say their real position is Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through! What is this “Stalinist state” (shades of Shachtman!)? This completely wipes out the fundamental Trotskyist understanding of the dual character of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which seeks to conciliate imperialism while resting on (and at times forced to defend) the proletarian property forms which issued from the October Revolution. Their statement wipes out the whole basis for Soviet defensism, which is the foundation of the Trotskyist call for workers political revolution to oust the Stalinists.

The bottom line is, *it isn’t their state!* The Soviet Union belongs to all the workers of the world. The Stalinists’ nationalism undermines the USSR, internationalist in its very foundations; their attempts to seal deals with imperialism (like over Afghanistan) jeopardize its defense. As Trotsky wrote in 1932, “We accept the workers’ state as it is and we assert, ‘This is our state.’ Despite its heritage of backwardness, despite starvation and sluggishness, despite the bureaucratic mistakes and even abominations, the workers of the entire world must defend tooth and nail their future socialist fatherland which this state represents.”

This passage was quoted in July 1941 by *Czerwony Sztandar* (Red Flag), the paper of the Trotskyists in the Warsaw Ghetto, in a statement on Hitler’s invasion of the USSR. “The first workers state is fighting for its existence,” they wrote. “The war of the Soviet Union against Hitler is the war of the international proletariat; it is our war.” No sir, BT, you won’t even hail the Red Army’s fight to smash Nazi barbarism. But the Trotskyists of the Warsaw Ghetto did. They end their declaration proclaiming: “Long live the Red Army! Long live the Russian Revolution! Long live the international revolution!”

Our readers might also take a look at the front page of the American Trotskyists’ *Young Spartacus* (November 1932) on the anniversary of the October Revolution, headlined “Hail Red Russia!” ■

## Document 2b.4

### Bolshevik Tendency reply to *Workers Vanguard* No. 453

The following letter, dated 21 June 1988, was written in response to Document 2b.3

Comrades:

You evidently had difficulty in responding to the political criticisms raised in our letter of 8 April regarding your “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” slogan (“BT Protests Too Much,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 453, 20 May). It was obviously for political reasons, and not considerations of space, that you found it necessary to delete major portions of our letter.

However, even by printing the selections which you did, you implicitly correct the deliberate distortion of our position which appeared in your original article on the subject (WV No. 449, 25 March). No doubt you omitted the account of the 5 March International Women’s Day demonstration in Toronto to avoid further humiliating your ailing Canadian branch. A leading SL comrade, Keith Douglas, freely admitted at the Lutte Ouvriere [LO] Fete in France last month that it had indeed been a “mistake” for the comrades of the Trotskyist League [TL] to have carried a banner inscribed “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” (We note that WV No. 451, 22 April, features a photo of a member of your Ithaca branch carrying the same slogan on March 12 so it would appear that this was not simply a local error.) Douglas also agreed that the slogan which we counterposed to the TL, “Oppose Gorbachev’s Sell-Out in Afghanistan!,” was correct.

But even if you are now prepared to concede “the obvious absurdity of ‘hailing’ an army which was on the verge of setting up a ‘horrible bloodbath’”—a point which you also deleted from our letter—you are still not off the hook. As we pointed out, “the Stalinists’ evident willingness to betray the Afghan women and leftists who had trusted them was proof that the SL’s ‘hail’ formula had been flawed *from the beginning*.” Your slogan contained no anticipation of Stalinist treachery, and could only disorient those who embraced it.

“In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective,” a founding document of the Revolutionary Tendency—progenitor of the Spartacist League—attacked the Socialist Workers Party [SWP] leadership for “minimiz[ing] the danger of Stalinism as a world counter-revolutionary force.” It went on to quote approvingly from the SWP’s 1953 fight against the Pabloists:

“The bureaucracy together with its agencies is not simply a passive reflector and acted-upon object of the world relationship of forces; the bureaucracy acts and reacts on the international arena as a potent factor in shaping the latter.... Not only is the vanguard misled by this minimizing of the pernicious results of the Kremlin’s course, but it is disarmed in the struggle to dispel illusions about Stalinism among the workers in order to break them from Stalinist influence....”

The political logic of “hailing” the Soviet military in Afghanistan led you, in your 25 March article, to announce that Brezhnev had been going “against the grain of the reactionary dogma of ‘socialism in one country’” in deciding to intervene. Our criticism of this idiotic position was deleted in the version of our letter which you printed, an omission that saved you from the embarrassment of having to retract it publicly.

In the *Transitional Program* Trotsky states, “In supporting the colonial country or the USSR in a war, the proletariat does not in the slightest degree solidarize either with the bourgeois government of the colonial country or with the Thermidorian bureaucracy of the USSR.” He concludes that,

“giving aid in a just and progressive war...strengthens there the authority and influence of the Fourth International, and increases its ability to help overthrow the bourgeois government in the colonial country, the reactionary bureaucracy in the USSR.” You will not find the Trotskyists “hailing” Haile Selassie’s army in its just struggle against the Italian fascists. Nor should we “hail” the Stalinist military.

Your citing the “Hail Red Russia!” banner on the November 1932 issue of *Young Spartacus* indicates that you have a pretty low opinion of the political sophistication of your readership. If one of the talented archivists of the Prometheus Research Library was to have a look at the preceding issue, he/she would find the headline “Vote Communist! Support the Revolutionary Candidates, Foster and Ford, in the Coming Elections.” We need hardly point out that in 1932 the Left Opposition still considered itself a faction *within* the Comintern.

Nor do we imagine you have forgotten that in 1933, after Hitler’s accession to power in Germany, the Left Opposition denounced the Comintern as a lifeless corpse and proclaimed the necessity for a new International and for the Soviet workers to take up arms in a political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist caste. We very much doubt that anything comparable to “Hail Red Russia!” can be found in the Trotskyist press after this definitive political break. Apparently for you, historical accuracy is less important than the opportunity to score a bogus polemical point.

You quote a passage from *Czerwony Sztandar*, the publication of the Trotskyists in the Warsaw Ghetto. We do not have access to this material and can therefore say very little about it. Yet, for the most part, the quotation which you cite reiterates the defensist position advocated by Trotsky: “The war of the Soviet Union against Hitler is the war of the international proletariat; it is our war.” You report that their declaration ends with three slogans: “Long live the Red Army! Long live the Russian Revolution! Long live the international revolution!” If indeed these are the slogans which they raised, it would appear that the necessity of political revolution—i.e., of conducting “revolutionary propaganda against Stalin”—is absent from this declaration. In another passage which you chose to delete from our 8 April letter, we quoted the slogans which Trotsky proposed for this situation: “Our defense of the USSR is carried on under the slogan: ‘For Socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!’ This formulation is politically superior.

While sputtering indignantly that we “won’t even hail the Red Army’s fight to smash Nazi barbarism” you *deleted* Trotsky’s advice—which we quoted—on the question. He instructed the Fourth Internationalists to establish “the closest possible comradesly relations with the rank-and-file fighters of the Red Army. While arms in hand they deal blows to Hitler, the Bolshevik-Leninists will at the same time conduct revolutionary propaganda against Stalin....” This is a proposal for *splitting* the Stalinist military apparatus, not *hailing* it. (At the same time, as Trotsky remarked, the struggle to overthrow the Kremlin oligarchs must be subordinated to the defense of proletarian property forms.)

You buttress your polemic against us with ridiculous assertions like, “for the last six years you’ve remained conspicuously close-mouthed on Afghanistan.” Who do you expect to fool with this lie? As you well know, for the past six years we

have repeatedly made it clear at demonstrations and public interventions, as well as in our literature, that we side militarily with the Soviets and their allies in Afghanistan. Your casual disregard for the truth is an index of your political degeneration.

And what is the meaning of your suggestion that raising the slogan of military victory to the Soviet intervention is somehow part of “paying the admission price to crawl into the all-Canada popular front”? In the twilight of the Reagan years, what kind of “popular front” would demand that its participants militarily support the Soviet army? As Trotsky remarked, even slander should make some sense.

In the midst of the uninspired hack-work which constitutes the bulk of your reply, there is one correct criticism. We refer to the formulation used by comrade Tom Riley in an oral intervention at a Trotskyist League forum in Toronto on 5 March when he stated, “Trotskyists never hail Stalinist traitors or their state.” While we endorse the sentiment regarding the perfidious character of the Stalinists, the phrase “or their state” is imprecise and could be taken to imply that we see the Soviet bureaucracy as a social class, which we do not. The Stalinist caste which rules from the Kremlin is a parasitic growth on the workers state, which is why Trotskyists call for a political as opposed to a social revolution in the USSR. The correct formulation for the idea which comrade Riley sought to convey would therefore be: “Trotskyists never hail Stalinist traitors or their state policy.”

As we commented in our 8 April letter, your 25 March polemic conveniently omitted “the clear and unambiguous reiteration of Soviet defensism which formed the framework for [Riley’s] intervention” at your Toronto forum. Naturally, you omitted this objection in *WV*. Instead you seize on a single misformulation and claim that it “wipes out the whole basis for Soviet defensism.” This is a profoundly dishonest way to conduct a polemic, as your own revered comrade Robertson once explained to the neo-Marcyite Communist Cadre (CTC) when they levelled a similar charge at the Spartacist League in 1977. The CTC claimed to have discovered the phrase “Stalinist state” in a 1966 issue of *Spartacist* and handed out a leaflet at an SL public meeting suggesting that this was evidence of a Shachtmanite deviation. Robertson, who apparently did not know at the time that the CTC reference was erroneous, responded as follows:

“ROBERTSON: OKAY, I RENOUNCE IT! It’s simple. Look. So you wrote a pretty serious thing, and if the phrase ‘Stalinist state’ by itself appears, it’s susceptible to a number of interpretations, including a new class theory. NOW, I SIMPLY SAY, I VACATE THE FORMULATION. NOW, EVERY WEEK I READ ARTICLES IN *WORKERS VANGUARD* AND I VACATE THE FORMULATIONS, I DISAGREE WITH THEM. BUT SO WHAT?

“THE STALINIST STATE APPARATUS MUST BE DESTROYED. Are you trying to say that, deep in our hearts, we really have a new class theory? Check with those guys from the LRW [LRP—League for the Revolutionary Party] if you think so. You’ll find out that we’re real hardened Pabloites inured to sell out to Stalinism. No, the Russian state is not a new class, and it’s a kind of hobby horse. Send us a letter and we will repudiate the formulation if in fact you’ve found one. You see, I once acknowledged this like this to somebody who’d misunderstood with malice. I don’t think you have. I think you probably found a defective formulation in our press in 1966. And I don’t make any demagoguery that it was eleven years ago, because eleven weeks ago I could find bad formulations, too!

“So please, if you’ve got a different position from us and you find a bad quote from us, do not load in—saying, you know, ‘Oh well, we hold Trotsky’s position (except that we

really don’t) and you’ve got this other position over here and a bad quote.’ That’s a bad thing to do. It does not aid anyone.”

—quoted in “What the Spartacist League Really Stands For,” CTC, emphasis in original

We could hardly have put it better ourselves. Comrade Robertson was quite right, it can serve no useful purpose to attack your political opponents for positions you know they don’t hold. We advise any SLers who are unsure about our position on the Russian question to take Robertson’s advice and check with the state-capitalist LRP.

The correct Trotskyist attitude to the events in Afghanistan, from the moment the Soviets initially intervened, was to offer military, but not political, support. The problem with the “Hail Red Army” slogan is that it obscures this vital distinction. The fact that it enraged various reformist and centrist pseudo-Trotskyists is neither here nor there. What they really objected to was the *position*, not the formulation.

You now seem willing to admit that it is absurd to proclaim this slogan while Gorbachev is in the process of pulling the Soviet army out of Afghanistan. But could not such a betrayal have been as easily perpetrated by Brezhnev, Andropov or Chernenko? If so, why was the slogan any more correct in 1979 when the Russians first intervened than it is today when they are in full flight?

Some of your newer members have suggested that the call for military victory is half-hearted, and that *real* revolutionaries are distinguished by the unqualified support implied by “Hail Red Army!” They may not know that “military victory” was the position of the Spartacist League throughout the Vietnam war. At that time SL comrades patiently explained to various subjectively revolutionary New Leftists and Pabloists, who were waving NLF flags, why it was necessary to call for “military victory” rather than simply “victory,” as the latter implies an element of political support.

The SL did not “hail” Ho Chi Minh and his army because at that time it still took seriously the struggle to forge a Trotskyist leadership for the international working class. This entailed educating the political vanguard about the treacherous nature of Stalinism, while militarily supporting the North Vietnamese army in its heroic struggle against imperialism.

The Spartacist League of today has a character very different from the SL of the Vietnam War era. Then, the SL believed that the revolutionary program could only be served by respecting the truth and seeking maximum clarity in political debate, even if that meant publicly admitting to its errors. Today’s Spartacist League, having despaired of the possibility of seriously influencing political reality, is mainly dedicated to maintaining the organizational supremacy and material privileges of its infallible founder-leader James Robertson and the sycophantic clique of personal devotees that surrounds him. To this end the SL does not hesitate to subordinate the Trotskyist program, Marxist theory and even the most elementary regard for the facts. It is because the Bolshevik Tendency has exposed the Spartacist League’s degeneration, both in its despotic internal regime and its increasingly erratic external political zig-zags, that the SL has called us racists, insinuated that we are police agents, and is now going to contorted lengths to read into our recent pronouncements on Afghanistan a desire “to set up [our] tent in the Third Camp.”

At the LO Fete this year, comrade Douglas predicted the SL would “politically smash” us over our change of slogan for Soviet defensism in Afghanistan. We responded by offering him the opportunity to do just that. We proposed to cancel our scheduled forum on the counterrevolutionary danger posed by Solidarnosc in 1981 and instead hold a debate over

the implications of our different slogans for Afghanistan. Comrade Douglas took our offer back for consideration, but the next day informed us that you could not accept our challenge. We were not surprised. Since it was obvious that your comrades were having considerable difficulty defending this Stalinophilic deviation in informal discussion, a public debate

could have been devastating. Your lack of political courage, though hardly commendable, is at least understandable. Nevertheless, our offer, which you deleted from our 8 April letter, still stands.

Fraternally,

Cathy Nason for the Bolshevik Tendency

## Document 2b.5

### *Soviets Abandon Women, Leftists to Mujahedin* Gorbachev's Afghan Sellout

Reprinted from 1917 No. 5, Winter 1988-89

On 15 May the USSR began a pullout of its 115,000 troops from Afghanistan. The withdrawal is being carried out as a result of an agreement signed in Geneva a month earlier by Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States. The accord commits the USSR to terminate its military presence entirely by February of next year. As of this writing, over half the Soviet force has already been sent home. Whatever unfortunate fate may befall those Afghans who identified themselves with the Kabul regime and its backers, the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan is not likely to be reversed. It is thus appropriate to draw up a balance sheet on the past eight-and-a-half years of Soviet intervention.

When the USSR dispatched its first combat divisions across the Afghan border in December 1979, the anti-Soviet din emanating from Washington and other imperialist capitals grew into a deafening clamor. The intervention, according to the Carter White House and various bourgeois media hacks, was the first step in a Soviet expansionist drive upon the oil lanes of the Persian Gulf. In response Carter slapped new trade restrictions on the Soviet Union, reinstated registration for the draft and boycotted the Moscow Olympics in the summer of 1980. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's chief anti-communist crusader, stood rifle-in-hand at the Khyber Pass to urge the Afghan rebels on against the "red menace," the western media sang paeans of praise to the "fierce," "loyal," and "heroic" Islamic "freedom fighters," defending Afghanistan's independence from "Soviet aggression."

What was the appropriate Trotskyist response to these cold war fulminations? It was necessary, in the first place, to counter the lie of Soviet expansionism with the simple truth that the Afghan intervention represented a defensive move on the Kremlin's part, aimed at protecting a client state on its southern flank against a threatened U. S.-sponsored, right-wing takeover. But even more important was the elementary duty of Trotskyists to denounce the hypocritical indignation over the violation of Afghanistan's "national sovereignty," shared by liberals, assorted Maoists, pro-Third World new leftists, and significant sections of the ostensible Trotskyist movement.

In general, Marxists do not advocate the imposition of social revolution upon nations by military force from without. The indigenous working class, even when a small minority of the population, is best capable of leading other oppressed classes forward in revolutionary struggle. Afghanistan, however, is so monumentally backward that the working class does not exist as a significant social force. In this situation, *some* kind of outside intervention is necessary to emancipate the Afghan masses from quasi-feudal despotism.

The Soviet intervention did not take place in the best of circumstances. The reformist, pro-Soviet People's Demo-

cratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) had come to power in a military coup and had little support outside of a layer of the urban intelligentsia. The PDPA was faction-ridden from the outset, and ineptly attempted to implement its program of reforms with commandist methods. This fueled a popular rightist insurgency, which prompted the Soviets' attempted rescue of the regime.

There is no denying that the great majority of Afghanistan's population supports the *jihad* against the Soviets and their allies. Yet Marxists do not choose sides in social conflicts on the basis of the relative popularity of the opposing forces. Rather, we are guided by the social and political character of the antagonists.

The nature of the contending forces in the Afghan war could not have been clearer. On the one side was a government in Kabul which, through a modest program of land reform, a moratorium on peasant debt, a literacy campaign, and a ceiling on the bride price, was attempting to bring Afghanistan out of the feudal darkness in which it had languished. It was no coincidence that the reform-minded intellectuals and military officers of the PDPA took as their model the Soviet Union, which, since 1917, has acted as an emancipator of Moslem peoples on the Soviet side of the Afghan border. The opposing camp comprised as unsavory a collection of reactionaries as can be found on the face of the earth: tribal patriarchs, feudal landlords, fanatical mullahs and opium-smuggling brigands, whose legendary hatred of social progress is matched only by their reputation for barbaric cruelty. Taking up arms against such threats to their "traditional way of life" as the spread of literacy and the mitigation of female slavery, these champions of "self-determination" found their natural allies in the military dictatorship of Zia's Pakistan, Khomeini's Islamic Republic and, most significantly, in U. S. imperialism, the world's chief counterrevolutionary gendarme, which has lavished \$2 billion on the insurgents. Only those pseudo-Marxists who do not know the difference between progress and reaction could have any doubt about which side to take in the Afghan war.

The Kremlin bureaucracy did not intervene in order to liberate the Afghan masses, but to keep Afghanistan (a Soviet client state since 1921) from falling into imperialist hands at a time when Washington was beating its anti-Soviet war drums with renewed fervor. They also must have feared that the reactionary contagion of Islamic fundamentalism which had just conquered Iran might penetrate to the Moslem regions of the USSR. But, regardless of the subjective motives of the Soviet bureaucrats, the Soviet army had joined a life-and-death struggle against the forces of oppression. It was (and is) unthinkable that the religious fanatics of the *mujahedin* would ever consent to share power with the existing regime in Kabul. Therefore, to prosecute the military struggle success-

fully, the Russian army could have been compelled to extend the remaining gains of the October Revolution to those areas under its control, thereby in effect imposing a social revolution from above. Such a development would have constituted an immense step forward for the Afghan masses, and a significant blow against imperialism. It was with these hopes in mind that the Bolshevik Tendency joined the international Spartacist tendency (to which the founding members of our group had previously belonged) in proclaiming the slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" (see accompanying article).

### Afghan Pullout: Humiliating Defeat for the USSR

Today those hopes are as far as ever from realization. The Soviet Union is leaving Afghanistan with nothing to show for eight years of combat except tens of thousands of dead and wounded. Far from transforming Afghan society, the Soviet bureaucrats from the outset had as their objective merely restoring the *status quo ante*: a Moscow-friendly regime in Kabul. The Soviets paved the way for their intervention in 1979 by engineering the murder of the militantly reformist Afghan president, Hafizullah Amin, and replacing him with the more "moderate" Babrak Karmal. Since that time the original PDPA land reform decrees have been annulled, religious instruction has been reintroduced into the public schools, over one hundred new mosques have been built under government auspices, tribal chiefs and Moslem clerics have been "elected" to the government and the symbol of Islam has been restored to the Afghan flag. By attempting to conciliate the khans and mullahs, the Soviets deprived themselves of an important political weapon—measures aimed at social and economic emancipation—that could have infused their ranks with fighting ardor and won the support of a substantial section of the dispossessed peasantry. The result of the Stalinists' attempts to conciliate reaction was a debilitating military stalemate.

When Mikhail Gorbachev finally decided to throw in the towel, the agreement signed in Geneva held no guarantees for the present Soviet client government of Najibullah. It took only a little arm twisting from Moscow to persuade the Afghan leader to sign his name to a document that he no doubt perceived as his own political death warrant.

Throughout the negotiations leading to the Geneva accords, Gorbachev acceded to one demand after another from the White House. The Soviets had initially proposed to pull out of Afghanistan over a period of four years but, when the Americans and Pakistanis suggested that they were thinking of something more like four months, Moscow agreed to nine months. The U. S. then demanded that the Russians agree to pull out half the troops in the first six months, and again Moscow agreed.

The U. S. and Pakistan had initially agreed to cease all aid to the anti-Soviet *mujahedin* guerrillas in exchange for the Soviet withdrawal. But before the Geneva accord was even signed, George Shultz stated that the U. S. would not stop supplying the *mujahedin* unless the Soviet Union reciprocated by terminating all military support to Kabul. Even this outrageous demand, clearly designed to sabotage the negotiations, did not deter the Soviets from surrendering. The deadlock was finally broken with a codicil to the main accord in which the Russians accepted continued U. S.-Pakistani aid to the guerrillas as long as the Soviets continued to support the Afghan government. With a stroke of the pen, the Kremlin agreed to the continuation of a CIA operation on the southern border of the USSR that dwarfs U. S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras! (Meanwhile the U. S. continues to arrogantly threaten to bomb Nicaragua should a single Soviet MIG fighter jet arrive in its ports.) In short, American imperialism

aimed for—and inflicted—a total humiliation on the Russians in Afghanistan.

A good indication of the fate in store for Afghanistan after the Russian withdrawal is given by the recent pronouncements of the Islamic fundamentalists who dominate the guerrilla coalition headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan. Their chief spokesman is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who began his political career at the University of Kabul by throwing acid in the faces of female fellow students who declined to wear the veil. These "holy warriors" bridle at the suggestion that the old king, Zahir Shah (who is equivalent to a communist in their eyes) be summoned from exile in Rome to head a new government, and have vowed to fight on, even after the Russians have left, for a regime comprised exclusively of Koran-waving zealots. With apparent U. S. and Pakistani backing, the fundamentalists have already begun to impose a virtual reign of terror upon the "moderate" guerrilla factions. One such "moderate," Bahauddin Majrooh, a former philosophy professor at Kabul University, was murdered by Hekmatyar's men in Peshawar last February for publishing a poll showing widespread support for Zahir Shah. If Afghanistan's traditional reactionary leaders are afraid to speak in public for fear of being next on the fundamentalists' hit list, what kind of treatment can the pro-Soviet government in Kabul, and those who supported it, expect at the hands of the *mujahedin* majority?

The withdrawal of Soviet troops will almost certainly be a prelude to a massacre. Among the victims will be women who disdain to enshroud themselves in the head-to-ankle veil, women who insist on their right to read, students, intellectuals and army officers, as well as anyone who refuses to bow five times a day to Mecca—in short, every progressive element in Afghanistan today.

### USec on Afghanistan: Menshevik Third Campism

While the bulk of the centrist and reformist currents which proclaim themselves Trotskyist have joined the imperialist-orchestrated chorus denouncing the Soviet intervention, probably the most cynical response has come from Ernest Mandel's "United Secretariat." An official USec statement issued on 21 March called for:

"a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan without negotiations between Moscow and Washington. The USSR must withdraw its forces from Afghanistan without delay, and continue to provide aid for the Afghan progressive forces struggling against the feudal-tribal and Islamic reactionaries...."

The hypocrisy of calling "for a defeat of the reactionary forces," while at the same time demanding a pullout of the very forces which *could* defeat reaction, is appalling. To call for a Soviet withdrawal is in effect to call for victory to the imperialist-backed counterrevolution. The USec leaders are fully aware that the inevitable consequence of the Soviet pullout will be a bloody carnival of reaction. These charlatans claim that while they would like to see a "genuine revolution" against the *mujahedin*, unfortunately "the conditions for that are a long way from being assembled today in Afghanistan" and therefore the Soviets must withdraw in order to "improve the chances for this [revolution] in the long term"! (*International Viewpoint*, 11 July). The cynicism inherent in describing the impending massacre of those Afghans who have thrown in their lot with the struggle against Islamic reaction, as a preparation for a "genuine revolution" at some point in the distant future, is breathtaking.

The Mandelites' visceral anti-Sovietism has led them to revive the Menshevik/Stalinist theory of "stages," which holds that every country around the globe must indigenously gen-

erate the conditions for socialism before the time is right for “genuine revolution.” But Professor Mandel and his coterie of flabby petty-bourgeois literary commentators and armchair “solidarity” specialists who constitute the USec leadership won’t be on the spot in Kabul when the *mujahedin* arrive, and so won’t personally participate in “improv[ing] the chances” for revolution. Perhaps if they held tenure in Kabul instead of in Brussels and Paris they might view the prospect of a Soviet pullout with less equanimity.

Leon Trotsky, whose legacy the USec falsely claims, explicitly rejected such stagist notions. Trotsky was aware that despite the fundamentally counterrevolutionary role of the Stalinist ruling caste, it is occasionally forced to take steps to defend, and even extend, the social gains of the October Revolution upon which its rule rests. Had the Kremlin opted to crush the Afghan reactionaries and incorporate that wretched country into the USSR, genuine Marxists would have defended this as a step forward for the Afghan masses. In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky specifically addressed the relation between the survival of the social gains of the October Revolution and the backward peoples of Central Asia when he wrote that, despite “immoderate overhead expenses,” the Stalinist bureaucracy, “is laying down a bridge for them to the elementary benefits of bourgeois, and in part even pre-bourgeois, culture.” To be consistent the USec should logically reject the extension of the Russian Revolution throughout Soviet Central Asia and into Mongolia—after all, these areas had hardly assembled the conditions for the “genuine revolution” which these modern-day Mensheviks advocate.

### Afghan Pullout: Fruits of Perestroika

The Soviet Union is not retreating from Afghanistan in the face of superior military force. By breaking the rebel siege of the provincial city of Khost in December, Soviet troops demonstrated that they are more than able to hold their own against the *mujahedin*, even though the latter have recently been equipped with American Stinger missiles and British anti-aircraft guns. The Soviet decision to withdraw is only the most outstanding example to date of Gorbachev’s policy of global capitulation to U. S. imperialism and its allies.

The Soviet retreat from Afghanistan follows close on the heels of the INF treaty, in which the Soviet Union agreed to accept the “zero option” on intermediate-range missiles in

Europe, at great military disadvantage to itself. Fidel Castro, at Gorbachev’s behest, is now offering to withdraw Cuban troops from Angola and accept a deal that would bring the rapacious cutthroats of Jonas Savimbi’s South African-backed UNITA forces into the government of that country. Aid to Nicaragua has been curtailed, and the Kremlin is bringing increased pressure on Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Kampuchea. And at the very moment when Israel is up to its elbows in the blood of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the Kremlin has initiated moves toward the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Zionist state.

These betrayals are the reflection in foreign policy of the economic restructuring (*perestroika*) now under way in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev has apparently decided that the USSR’s “foreign commitments” (read: aid to anti-imperialist struggles throughout the world) are incompatible with his efforts to modernize the Soviet economy. By placating the imperialists on the international front, Gorbachev hopes to undercut Reagan’s anti-Soviet war drive and reduce Western pressure on the Soviet Union. He thinks this will allow him to channel part of the resources now used for military production and foreign aid into the flagging Soviet domestic economy.

Such policies are a recipe for disaster. They can only succeed in convincing the imperialists that the “get-tough” approach to the Soviet Union has finally paid off. This will in turn whet their appetite for reconquest of the land of the October Revolution. The Soviet bureaucrats are practiced in the art of treachery. Just as the belief in economic autarky and “peaceful coexistence” led the Stalinists to betray revolutions in China in 1927, Spain in 1936, Greece in 1946, so it leads them today to deliver Afghanistan into the deadly embrace of khans and mullahs.

Gorbachev’s willingness to abandon the thousands of Afghan women, students and progressive intellectuals who trusted the Kremlin oligarchs, serves as a stark reminder that the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy endangers the social gains upon which it rests. The defense of those gains, and their extension, ultimately depends on the success of a proletarian political revolution, led by a conscious Trotskyist party, which will obliterate the parasitic caste that Gorbachev represents and restore the internationalist and revolutionary mission of the state established by the October Revolution. ■

## Document 2b.6

*Bending the Stick Too Far...*

### On the Slogan ‘Hail Red Army’

Reprinted from 1917 No. 5, Winter 1988-89

Since the formation of our political tendency, six years ago, our polemics with other leftists on Afghanistan have revolved around the fundamental question of which way to point the guns—at the imperialist-backed *mujahedin* or at the Soviet army. The slogan “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!”, which we carried over from the Spartacist League, left no room for confusion on that question. But the impending Soviet betrayal in Afghanistan has demonstrated that this slogan was flawed. To continue to “hail” the Soviet army as it cuts and runs is absurd on its face; but any of Gorbachev’s Stalinist predecessors could just as easily have carried out the same betrayal. Thus we have to conclude that more careful attention

to the Trotskyist criteria for evaluating the military actions of the Soviet bureaucracy would have prevented us from adopting this mistaken formulation in the first place, and hence spared us the necessity of having to withdraw it along with the retreating Soviet army.

Trotskyists have always been careful to distinguish between *military* and *political* support to the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Stalinist ruling caste in the Soviet Union, for all of its counter-revolutionary betrayals, still exercises power within the framework of collectivized property established by the October Revolution. The Soviet Union is thus the object of implacable imperialist hostility. In the face of capitalist aggression, the Stalinist bureaucracy cannot defend itself with-

out simultaneously defending, and in certain cases extending geographically, the socialized property forms upon which its rule is based. Trotskyists, who consider these property forms a historic gain for the working class, place themselves unambiguously on the same side of the barricades as the Stalinist bureaucracy in any military confrontation with imperialism.

But military support to the Soviet Union no more implies confidence in the bureaucracy or its methods than, for example, support for the PATCO strike in 1981 implied endorsing Lane Kirkland and the AFL-CIO officialdom who sold out the strike. Just as we point out that unions can best be defended by replacing the present labor traitors with a revolutionary leadership, so we argue that only through the ouster of the Stalinist bureaucrats can the social advances embodied in the degenerated/ deformed workers states be consistently defended. To the national insularity, treachery and contempt for the masses of the Stalinists, we counterpose our own program of workers democracy and revolutionary proletarian internationalism. Thus military support to the Stalinists against imperialism does not imply one iota of political support for them or their methods.

The trouble with the slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" is that it failed to distinguish between political and military support. The Soviet army (which has not officially been called the "Red Army" since 1946) is the military arm of the Kremlin bureaucracy. The army's policies are those of the bureaucracy. Its role is therefore a contradictory one, like that of the bureaucracy itself. Insofar as the Russian army defends the Soviet Union against imperialism (and this was indeed its purpose in going into Afghanistan), we are on its side militarily. If it sweeps away oppressive social structures and replaces them with collectivized property in the areas under its control (and this was undoubtedly *one possibility* of the Russian intervention), we will support such measures. But to support the Soviet army uncritically (i.e., to "hail" it) would put us in the position of having to apologize for the Stalinists when they accommodate themselves to the social *status quo* or undertake a cowardly retreat. And, not surprisingly, this is exactly what they have done in Afghanistan.

Some SL supporters argue that "Hail Red Army!" was simply an emphatic way of lending military support to Soviet forces, against the cold-war hysteria which escalated immediately after the intervention. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the Spartacist League did warn of the possibility of a Soviet betrayal at the time it first advanced the slogan. While the supposed Moscow-loyalists of the Communist Party were wincing and looking for places to hide, the SL advanced this deliberately angular formulation in the face of a wave of anti-Sovietism which was sweeping America. Commendable as this impulse may have been, there is no getting around the fact that taken literally and by itself, the slogan amounts to a blanket political endorsement of the Soviet role in Afghanistan.

As Trotsky wrote, "In order that these two varieties of 'defense of the USSR' [the Stalinists' and the Fourth International's] do not become confused in the consciousness of the masses it is necessary to know clearly and precisely how to formulate slogans which correspond to the concrete situation" (*In Defense of Marxism*). The call for "Military Victory to the Soviet Army" corresponded to the concrete situation in Afghanistan because it placed us squarely on the Soviet side of the battle lines without assuming any responsibility for Stalinist betrayals.

### Political Bandits and Soviet Defensism

The Bolshevik Tendency, many of whose members were driven out of the Spartacist League (SL) for the sin of thinking

for themselves, has traced the SL's degeneration from a genuine democratic-centralist organization into the leader cult that it is today. In the Spartacist League, where democratic centralism has long been a dead letter, the political line is decreed from the top and even the mildest internal dissent is often taken as evidence of disloyalty to the regime of James Robertson, SL National Chairman and Peerless Leader. To deflect all criticism of his despotic internal regime, Robertson routinely asserts that his critics are secretly animated by sinister motives, the desire to abandon the defense of the Soviet Union not least among them. It was therefore perfectly predictable that the SL would seize upon our criticism of "Hail Red Army" as "evidence" that we were nothing but rotten anti-Soviet renegades from the beginning.

No sooner did we raise our criticisms of this slogan at a Trotskyist League of Canada (Canadian Robertsonites) forum in Toronto, than the SL rushed into print with an article entitled "BT Says Don't Hail Red Army in Afghanistan" (*Workers Vanguard* [WV], 25 March). This article claims that our rejection of "Hail Red Army" is proof positive that we are about to abandon Soviet defensism in favor of Shachtmanism. WV attempts to support its claim that "the BT is preparing to set up its tent in the Third Camp" with a hodge-podge of assertions so fragmentary and disingenuous that attempting to refute them is like trying to pin down a glob of mercury. We are nevertheless obliged to try.

The article is predicated on a false dichotomy: *either* we accept the formulation, "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" *or* we deny the contradictory nature of the Soviet bureaucracy and imply that it is "counterrevolutionary through and through":

"What the BT 'disappears' is the contradictory character of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The line of 'Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through and to the core,' a more concise and eloquent expression of the BT position, first appeared as a one-sided formulation during the Socialist Workers Party's 1952-53 internal struggle against the pro-Stalinist Cochran-Clarke liquidators.... [The BT] prefer the image of soul-destroying, monolithic Stalinist totalitarianism."

This is known as argument by bald assertion. There is simply no basis for such a conclusion in anything we have said. It is rather the "Hail Red Army!" slogan *itself* that obliterates the contradictory possibilities inherent in Soviet Afghan policy from the outset. The 25 March *Workers Vanguard* admits that, unlike World War II in which the Soviet Union was determined to crush the Nazi invaders:

"... the Soviet bureaucracy never really tried to win in Afghanistan because it refused to implement a social revolution. One bourgeois commentator recently recognized that 'The Soviet Army has never committed itself fully in Afghanistan'"

In this context, "Hail Red Army!" roughly translates as "Hurrah for the Army that is Not Smashing Islamic Reaction!" or "Hurrah for the Army that Does *NOT INTEND* to Smash Islamic Reaction!" "Evocative" perhaps, but what does it *evoke*?

### The Contradictions of Stalinism

The Spartacist claim that our objection to "Hail Red Army!" amounts to a denial of Stalinism's contradictory character only makes sense on the basis of a very peculiar notion of those contradictions. Is the SL implying that the Soviet military somehow embodies the "progressive" side of the Stalinist bureaucracy as opposed to the civilian apparatus of the Communist Party, which represents its conservative side? On this premise alone can the slogan "Hail Red Army!" be seen as

an attempt to exploit the “contradictions” of the Soviet ruling caste—by setting the bureaucracy’s left wing (the military) against its right wing (the Politburo).

The Soviet officer corps and the CPSU Politburo are both integral parts of the Stalinist ruling caste, with the former subordinate to the latter. Within both groups, moreover, there are various political differences, including the perennial tensions between “moderates” and “hardliners” so dearly beloved of Western Kremlinologists. But the differences between these groupings are merely tactical and transient. At another political juncture, those holding out for more favorable terms in Afghanistan could become the most vocal advocates of surrender and *vice versa*. Trotskyists do not hand out blank checks of support to any wing of the bureaucracy.

The Soviet bureaucracy is not “monolithic” in any simple sense. There are within it all kinds of factions and shadings of opinion, as there are in any political formation. Individuals committed to genuine Bolshevism (such as Ignace Reiss) may occasionally surface from its ranks. Further, the bureaucracy is a brittle and unstable caste, and entire sections of it could go over to the side of the working class in the course of a political revolution in the degenerated/ deformed workers states. This happened in Hungary in 1956. But as a whole, and in the absence of a proletarian upsurge, the bureaucracy remains committed to the maintenance of its political power. The contradictions of Soviet society are obliquely reflected in the infighting among various factions of the bureaucracy, but such struggles occur within the framework of how best to preserve bureaucratic rule.

The fundamental contradiction of the deformed and degenerated workers states is between the social base of the collectivized economies and the Stalinists’ paralyzing monopoly of political decision-making which introduces all kinds of distortions and irrationalities into the planning process, and thus constitutes a fetter on economic and social development. This contradiction cannot be resolved by the triumph of one bureaucratic faction over another, but only through the overthrow of the *entire* parasitic Stalinist caste by a workers political revolution.

The Spartacist League of course professes to agree with this and to uphold the Trotskyist program of political revolution in the degenerated/ deformed workers states. However the logic of its polemic against us points in another direction. Could the implication of a left/ right differentiation between the Soviet military and the rest of the ruling stratum suggest that the SL is giving up hope in the Soviet workers and banking on some bureaucratic faction to redeem the USSR instead? The SL leadership has not yet fully answered this question, perhaps not even for itself. But, to paraphrase a recent WV polemic, maybe a few of its cards have unintentionally been laid on the table.

### Whither Jimstown?

The degeneration of a revolutionary organization does not take place overnight. It is only under the pressure of events and in sparring with other political tendencies that revisionist appetites gradually emerge. At the outset of Reagan’s anti-Soviet crusade, the Spartacist League correctly adopted a hard Soviet-defensist stance. But by this time the degeneration of the SL’s internal regime was already at an advanced stage. It was only a matter of time before the SL, having lost confidence in its ability to lead the working class, began to look around for other forces to accomplish this task.

As the politically stagnant 1980’s wore on, the SL began to show signs of sliding over from Soviet defensism into a certain affinity for Stalinist regimes. On the internal side this slippage did not take the form of clearcut political pronouncements, but was unmistakable nonetheless. Photo-

graphs of Wojciech Jaruzelski, Poland’s military strongman, began to appear on the walls of the group’s New York headquarters. This mood simultaneously found external political expression when the New York contingent in the SL’s 1982 anti-Klan demonstration in Washington chose to call itself the “Yuri Andropov Brigade,” after the Stalinist butcher of the Hungarian Revolution. When the SL mounted a series of international “emergency” demonstrations in 1983, calling for seating Kampuchea’s Stalinist rulers at the United Nations, it carried signs hailing the pro-Vietnamese wing of the Kampuchea Stalinists as “Real Khymer Communists.” On this occasion, the SL also carried placards “hailing” the Stalinists’ reconstruction of the economy. Yet the Trotskyist call for political revolution to oust the Stalinist regimes in Kampuchea and Vietnam was deliberately omitted.

But incipient Stalinophilia is only one manifestation of the SL’s political decline. There is also a growing fear of offending the U. S. bourgeoisie, especially at those critical moments when American lives are on the line. Hence the SL’s extreme solicitude for the Reaganaut Star Warriors who took their last ride aboard the ill-fated Challenger, and its call to bring U. S. Marines home “alive” from Lebanon during the imperialist intervention in that country in 1983. In 1984, the SL offered in the pages of its public press to “defend” the Democratic National Convention against a hallucinated right-wing threat and went so far as to call on the labor movement to do likewise.

These curtsies in the direction of the American bourgeoisie might seem at first glance incompatible with the SL’s recent admiration for Stalinist leaders. But, as the experience of the U. S. Communist Party attests, following the Stalinist lead abroad is by no means incompatible with class collaboration at home. Pessimism about the ability of the proletariat and its vanguard to transform the world is the common denominator. If an organization no longer believes in its own revolutionary capacities, why not play it safe domestically and entrust Marxism’s revolutionary mission to someone else far away—like the “Red Army” in Afghanistan.

Although the Robertsonites’ future trajectory is not completely clear, they are now in a political bind. They have been unable to construct a convincing rebuttal to the Bolshevik Tendency’s critique of their external political flip-flops. As for our extensive documentation of the degeneration of the SL’s internal life, they remain silent, because our allegations are true and verifiable. The SL is therefore working overtime to find a political club to hit us with, and wishfully thinks it has found one in Afghanistan.

In this connection the SL has published a new document on the BT, which features extracts from the debate over “hailing” the Soviet army in Afghanistan and also includes selections from our polemical exchanges on a variety of questions, from the U. S. Marines in Lebanon to the destruction of Challenger. Those who are seriously interested in these debates should not be content with the portions selected by the SL. In *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 1 and 2, we published the *complete* texts of our debates on the Yuri Andropov Brigade and saving the Marines in Lebanon. We also have copies available of the complete text of our polemics on the “Hail Red Army!” slogan.

While the Spartacist League apparently finds it necessary to invest considerable time and energy in a continuing series of polemics against our positions, their leadership has consistently refused to face us in open, public debate over any of the disputed issues. In our 8 April letter to WV we proposed to the SL:

“In view of your apparent interest in the implications of the correction in our formulation of Soviet defensism in Afghanistan, and your insistence that those who refuse to

---

‘hail’ the Stalinists are headed for the Third Camp, we propose a public debate on the question—in either New York or Toronto—at the earliest mutually convenient date.”

We reiterated this offer in a 21 June letter. So far, the Robertsonites, well aware that discretion is the better part of valor, have declined. In the Spartacist League today, theory and program have become the handmaidens of a leader

whose chief preoccupation is the maintenance his own personal supremacy. The fact is that the SL leaders are afraid to engage in public political debate with us because they know they cannot defend “hailing” the Soviet military, except by contradicting the theoretical and programmatic underpinnings of Trotskyism upon which their organization is supposedly based. ■

## PART 2C: ROBERTSON'S BOGUS BRIGADE

### Document 2c.1

#### PDC: For Internationalist Military Support to Afghan Government!

Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard*, No. 471, 17 February 1989

[WV Introduction] We reprint below a letter from the Partisan Defense Committee to the government of Afghanistan, offering concrete support in the struggle against the murderous reactionary *mujahedin*. The letter proposes organization of an international brigade to assist in defending the Afghan peoples against the CIA's feudalistic terrorists. When we spoke with representatives of the Afghan government about the letter, they thanked us for this initiative while indicating that they believe such a measure is not necessary to defend the country at this time.

7 February 1989

To: Ambassador of the Republic of Afghanistan

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

With the withdrawal of the Soviet Army now completed, we join with you in fearing that elementary social progress is in grave danger in Afghanistan. The right of women to read, freedom from the veil, freedom from the tyranny of the mullahs and the landlords, the introduction of medical care and the right of all to an education—we are compelled to offer our aid before all this is drowned in blood. The Partisan Defense Committee hereby makes the urgent offer to organize an international brigade to fight to the death in defense of these rights in Afghanistan. Volunteers would of course oper-

ate under your control and direction.

The Partisan Defense Committee is a class-struggle defense organization supported by militant Marxists worldwide, many associated with the international Spartacist tendency.

In making this offer, we pledge to handle all aspects of agitation, propaganda and recruitment necessary to amass forces and publicize the effort. These forces would be recruited internationally from among disaffected progressive youth, leftist militants, liberation fighters, and decent people who wish to prevent the destruction of any vestige of human progress achieved through struggle. We further pledge to provide transport to an appropriate transit point. International fighters would be expected to acquire equipment when in place.

From the Afghan government we would need air fare from a transit point to Kabul and, in the field, food and military direction.

Capitalist governments which hypocritically condemned the presence of the Red Army in Afghanistan are fleeing Kabul, aghast at the prospect of a full-scale civil war reaching that city. They abandon their embassies now in the hopes of returning after the victory of the feudalist *mujahedin*. This must not happen!

We hope most fervently that you will accept this offer of assistance proffered with a keen sense of internationalist duty. Please respond as soon as possible. ■

### Document 2c.2

#### Letter to Paris

*The following is the letter with which James Robertson initiated the international Spartacist tendency's projected "International Brigade" for Afghanistan in 1989. This letter was originally published in the iSt's International Discussion Bulletin No. 19, March 1989.*

(fax) by Jim

6 February 1989

To: Paris

See if appropriate Afghan embassy interested in International Brigade to be flown in via India.

Down with the Mullahs!

War to the Death!

Now is the winter of our discontent

Jim

Plan to use the youthful scum of the left Stalinists, hard Trotskyists, radical skinheads and the odd witless Aussie and embittered Iranian émigrés—the Mad Marx Brigade.

To list add: Guevarist (i.e., Auguste Blanquists and Tukhachevskyites). Expect from government: military direction and some food. Brigade will get own weapons by using rocks, sawed-off shotguns and fire-hardened spears, working nights. Recruit especially in Italy and Latin America but from all over. "Kiss your ass goodbye, Long Live Communism!"

No pay just expenses.

## Document 2c.3

### Letter to PDC

*The following is a letter from William C., a leading member of the iSt's French section at the time, in response to the Partisan Defense Committee's proposed "International Brigade." Note that William correctly anticipated that the PDC's offer would be rejected. This letter was originally published in the iSt's International Discussion Bulletin No. 19, March 1989.*

(translation, fax)  
by William

Paris  
8 February 1989

PDC  
New York

Dear Comrades,

I would like to set forth here my objections and disagreements with the position taken by the PDC as expressed in its letter to the embassies of this 7 February.

To make my point more easily, I am for the moment going to create an inappropriate confusion between the PDC and iSt.

We are, at this stage of our development, a propaganda group which chooses the subjects, the places and times to concretize, even in a limited way, one or several crucial aspects of our program. It's a question of "exemplary work," aimed at applying our program, in motion, in action on a scale which is *qualitatively* proportionate to our capacities and our immediate or potential influence so that in return it can come back to feed our propagandist activity, literary or otherwise, and augment our impact on reality.

Obviously, practically any action which is somewhat substantial surpasses our *immediate* capacities. It is also true that occasionally, and this is what we systematically seek, these actions go beyond an "exemplary" character, such as the successes we have had in Atlanta or Washington, because, to simplify, we have intersected something real in the milieu. If this were not the case, we would be only a "propagandistic" organization as certain of our detractors say.

When we take an initiative, we de facto define a reasonable bracket between a minimum and a maximum which differentiates a reasonable success from a total failure. And in unfavorable circumstances, we fix our minimum at that which simply our forces could do without it being a devastating failure. And unfortunately, it can even happen that one is wrong!

Let's be clear, it is not a question of simple arithmetic, a science which I am not good at, it is necessary to gauge the impact, the dynamic effect or as they say now, the news value. When I speak of the forces, I don't mean simply the number of militants, nor the state of the treasury, nor even the simple influence we've had in qualitatively similar circumstances.

Now, in the famous letter of 7 February, we "pledge" ourselves to construct what amounts to the actual organization of one or several international brigades.

It is one thing to say in written or oral propaganda that which is necessary, it's another thing to commit ourselves to do the necessary thing immediately.

And including at the historical level, we assign to the proletariat only those tasks which it can fulfill.

But even in propaganda, we don't attempt to be other than what we are and we do not "pledge" ourselves immediately to such and such an objective just on the basis of "necessity."

Now, I assert, without much risk, that this "pledge" would be impossible to honor except if we liquidate ourselves in a last act, heroic certainly, but futile since it is necessarily doomed to failure.

If, by chance, our offer were accepted (and I am not worried on that score) we would consume ourselves hopelessly. Even with the help of a hypothetical dynamic effect multiplied by the "popularity" of the cause, our impact would not be sufficient to even begin the beginning of the realization of such a project. Hence ensuring devastating effects.

Further, simply at the level of propaganda, I don't even see how we could use such a "pledge" since even the workers politically closest to us could evaluate the relationship of forces and would realize the inanity of such a proposition even if it is not accepted!

And I don't think I'm engaging in any kind of "possibilism" here.

At another level, and here I break the pretense that permitted me to push my argument, I am surprised at the procedure: the PDC pledges itself. Why the PDC? If, by extraordinary circumstance, the idea were accepted by the ambassadors, the PDC, without real means, would have to turn to the SL/U.S. and therefore the iSt, to honor the pledge to which it had subscribed in its place. Something is wrong here.

A more general objection, and less clear. I have some difficulty in remembering that the Trotskyists have ever called for the formation of international brigades. That cadres, militants, joined them or were sent in for reasons of political opportunity, I am convinced. But that the SWP or the European Bolshevik-Leninists had directly organized such brigades...

Cannon's telegram to Stalin [reprinted in the *Militant*, 5 July 1941] was on another scale: hazardous, certainly, but physically possible immediately.

I have another bunch of objections which I will refine before putting them to paper.

Trotskyist greetings,  
William

## Document 2c.4

### Letter to William

*The following is James Robertson's response to William C.'s objections. Note that Robertson suggests that if the PDC proposal were accepted it would be the Afghan government's "problem" to implement it. This suggests that Robertson was also heavily discounting the possibility that the PDPA might take the PDC up on its offer. This impression is reinforced by the suggestion that it was "feasible" that the PDC could recruit "10,000 armed committed men" for the venture. This letter was originally published in the iSt's International Discussion Bulletin No. 19, March 1989.*

(Fax) by Jim

07 February 1989, 7:40 p.m. (local time)

Dear William,

No, William, I don't think we've gone completely mad. This is not Stalin's government vis-à-vis Spain in 1936. But I do think we could recruit military detachments for the Kabul government. If you think about it, a pretty motley lot—from Shining Path (now that the Russians are out) to Gurkhas to Sikhs. Possibly you know people who don't know whether to kill Le Pen or join him. They can find their soul in Afghanistan. If the soul slides to the right, they may come back only as leathery shrunken heads, the object of a vigorous polo game.

As you noted, "I have some difficulty in remembering that the Trotskyists have ever called for the formation of international brigades." I do too, I think that this is essentially a Tukhachevskyite operation, not a political one. Nahuel Moreno sent such a brigade to Nicaragua, but only at the moment of victory.

While we know many places to seek recruits, involving rather fairly large and certainly psychotic groups of people, basically I would see our role as catalytic. We can propose, but should the Afghan government accept, then it's their problem. Have you ever talked to a Druze militant?

In the seventh paragraph of the first page of your letter you use the word "construct." I would have said "recruit."

We are in a sea of imponderables; but it does in fact seem to me that 10,000 armed committed men, not least deeply embittered Iranian émigrés, might make the difference. It is feasible. Transit, e.g., out of India, could be coequal to recruitment in difficulty.

I was thinking of hitting the psycho wards in the VA hospitals with the pitch: "This time, be on the right side! Fight for Communism!"

I have a slogan, "Free all political prisoners everywhere—Send them to Afghanistan!"

Hopefully for good and mayhap victory, certainly some of our own members will be among those who seek to turn the future of war in the face of Russian betrayal. Does *glasnost* extend to recruiting kiosks in Leningrad and Moscow?

I am thinking of a private effort, not a public one.

We did link in our statement to Kabul the PDC with the iSt.

I'm glad some comrades have a residual trace of sanity, but is that *always* good? Lenin never said socialism stopped at Russia's borders.

Jim

P.S. If Green is North, is South Red?

## Document 2c.5

### Letter to Frederico

*The following letter was written by James Robertson to Frederico P., one of the iSt's leading European cadres at the time. Note Robertson's suggestion that "Trotskyists would have their throats cut upon landing" in Kabul. This parallels our observation that it could be "hazardous for young militants...identified with a 'Trotskyist' organization to place themselves under the 'control and direction' of the PDPA..." which the SL subsequently denounced (see Document 2c.10 below). Frederico did go to Kabul and his report subsequently appeared in the 21 July 1989 of Workers Vanguard (see 2c.9). This letter was originally published in the iSt's International Discussion Bulletin No. 19, March 1989.*

(Fax by Jim)

[dictation draft]

09 February 1989

Dear Federico,

I am responding to your letter of yesterday which I do not have in hand. I thought that, over all, you had the idea excellently in hand. But I thought that you truly confused the political with the military.

We are not trying to supplant, but to aid, the Kabul gov-

ernment. Trotskyists would have their throats cut upon landing. I think that to describe the PDC as "Marxist" is too narrow. The PDC is not programmatic or ideologic but issue-oriented. In Afghanistan there is little proletariat. The way all this shit unfolded is because the Parcham and Khalq factions of the Afghan left thought there was a proletariat.

You appear gravely concerned about the reference to "private initiative." Well, it's hardly secret but while we have been making this offer to the Afghan government, it would have defeated the possibility of acceptance if we spread it around in advance. I think the Afghans have turned down our proposal as such but in a very friendly way and with implication that we might be able to offer them help of another sort. Perhaps they mean such as the excellent work that Ben Linder did in Nicaragua. But should we find it possible to be of some assistance for our side in this war, it certainly would not remain anything resembling a private matter.

Would you like to go instantly to Kabul as our correspondent? You are well qualified.

Last year in Stromboli,

Jim

## Document 2c.6

### On SL/PDC 'Brigade' for Kabul Fake-Trotskyists Make Fake Offer

Reprinted below is a letter from the Bolshevik Tendency to the Spartacist League regarding a proposal by the SL's Partisan Defense Committee to organize a combat brigade for Afghanistan:

16 March 1989

Comrades:

The rather bizarre letter from the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC) to Najibullah's Washington ambassador offering to organize an international brigade to Kabul (*Workers Vanguard* 17 February) is notable for the utter unreality of the proposal. We presume that the masterminds of the PDC/SL intended their offer to the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) as a spectacular (but cheap) method of sidling up to the "tankies" in the disintegrating West European Communist Parties. From a military standpoint there is no reason to imagine that even the combined might of both the Spartacist League and the Partisan Defense Committee could appreciably affect the balance of forces in Afghanistan. Apparently the PDPA reached the same conclusion.

The SL leadership's treatment of the Partisan Defense Committee as an all-purpose "mass" organization capable of taking significant initiatives in the international class struggle has a decidedly fictitious quality. It is hardly a secret that the PDC is essentially the SL/US in suit and tie. Yet some of your members seem genuinely disoriented by this ludicrous posturing. At your 24 February forum in Berkeley, SL supporters estimated that the PDC could mobilize between one and ten thousand (!) participants for such a venture. In Toronto on March 8, a Spartacist member announced at a public class that the PDC could probably have recruited a couple of thousand members for its brigade from Pakistan and India! The Spartacist League used to criticize the Healyites ruthlessly for creating illusory, self-contained Potemkin Villages. Today it is engaged in the same kind of fakery.

Even if we ignore for the moment the absurdity of the PDC's pretensions of playing a significant military role in Afghanistan, the whole orientation to the Afghan government is sharply at variance with any claim to Trotskyism. The proposal explicitly states that the PDC "Volunteers would of course operate under your [Republic of Afghanistan] control and direction." Quite apart from the dangers posed by the extremely unfavorable military and political situation created by Gorbachev's ignominious pull-out, it could have proved extremely physically hazardous for young militants (or guilt-ridden ex-members) identified with a "Trotskyist" organization to place themselves under the "control and direction" of the PDPA—a Stalinist organization with a history of bloody purges within its own ranks. *Workers Vanguard* compares the PDPA leadership with Kemal Ataturk: let us remind you of the fate of the Turkish communists at his hands.

The proposed expedition to Kabul recalls the SL's offer of a dozen "defense guards" to protect the Democratic Party Convention in 1984. That too was a proposal which was meant to be rejected. There is a certain cynicism evident in such publicity stunts. The difference between the two situations is that the PDPA and the secular residents of Kabul are in genuine physical danger, whereas Mondale, Wallace et. al.

were not, as we pointed out at the time (see *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*, No. 4).

You spent most of the last decade "hailing" the Soviet bureaucracy's Afghanistan policy. This same bureaucracy is now bitterly denounced for "cold-blooded betrayal." Yet WV (17 February) still ludicrously refers to Moscow's intervention as "the one unambiguously decent and progressive act" which the CPSU oligarchs carried out in the past twenty years. While Trotskyists sided militarily with the Soviet army against the *mujahedin*, just as we today militarily support Najibullah's troops, by now the ambiguity of the Soviet intervention should be clear even to your most dim-witted member. The reason that it must still be praised as "unambiguously decent and progressive" is that James Robertson, your *lider maximo*, has put his imprimatur on the non-Trotskyist slogan of "Hail Red Army!," a slogan which, if nothing else, is unambiguous in its expression of confidence in the policies of the Soviet rulers.

In a nod to objective reality, the WV article reiterates this earlier (1980) comment:

"Of course, the conservative bureaucrats in the Kremlin did not send 100,000 troops into Afghanistan to effect a social revolution, but simply to make secure an unstable, strategically placed client state....It is possible the Kremlin could do a deal with the imperialists to withdraw..."

How are WV readers supposed to reconcile this with the assertion, on the same page, that the Soviet intervention went "against the grain of the reactionary Stalinist dogma of 'socialism in one country'"? As we remarked in our letter of 8 April, this is:

"...on its face, simply stupid. Was Stalin 'going against the grain' of Stalinism when he intervened in Finland in 1939? Or when he decided to expropriate the East European bourgeoisie after the war? Of course not. On another level though this formulation is perhaps not so accidental. Those who despair of the historic possibility of the working class, led by a conscious Trotskyist vanguard, intervening to change the world have often in the past looked to one or another alternative agency for social progress. This is the political significance of your inclination to 'hail' the Stalinist bureaucracy and identify yourselves with Andropov et al."

As you know, Brezhnev reportedly had to personally override very considerable opposition at the top of the CPSU to initiate what you consider to have been the "unambiguously decent and progressive act" of military intervention in Afghanistan. With this in mind, perhaps you might have wanted to dub your hypothetical international expeditionary force the "Leonid Brezhnev Brigade."

Those comrades in the international Spartacist tendency who are serious about the urgent necessity to struggle to establish Trotskyism as a mass current in the international proletariat must break from the cynical posturing of the Robertson gang and join with the Bolshevik Tendency in the struggle for the Rebirth of the Fourth International—World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Fraternally,  
Bolshevik Tendency

## Document 2c.7

### Bolshevik Tendency letter to Trotskyist League of Canada

*The following letter was dated 2 April 1989*

Dear Comrades:

We were pleased to note at your forum last night that, after almost five years, you have finally abandoned your policy of physically excluding our supporters from the informal discussions at the conclusion of your public meetings. This undemocratic and completely unjustified practice, which began in June 1984 and continued until your public class of 8 March this year, served as an impediment to the free flow of ideas which is an essential part of the development of a genuine revolutionary movement.

Of course we understand that our political differences, including on the organizational question, remain as profound as ever. Nonetheless, we welcome your abandonment of this exclusion policy as a step in the direction of dealing with the disagreements between our two organizations *politically*.

We appreciate the necessity of the heightened security measures which you took in light of the threats of attack on the meeting. We understand that you contacted various people in the left to request assistance in defending your meeting. As we told the comrade in charge of your security squad, we were quite prepared to help. If you consider it necessary, please do not hesitate to contact us for this purpose in future.

We found the meeting quite interesting politically, particularly the discussion on the relative merits of your slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" versus ours of "Military Victory to the Soviet Army." As you know, we consider your slogan seriously flawed because "hailing" the Soviet intervention amounted to an unambiguous endorsement of the Kremlin's policies and did not alert the workers to the very real possibility, from the first, of Stalinist treachery.

In her summary, comrade Miriam, who gave the main presentation for the TL, took the profoundly anti-Trotskyist programmatic logic implicit in this slogan to new depths. She stated that there was always a possibility of betrayal but argued that in major social struggles there is *always* a potential for betrayal and that specifically, "the potential for betrayal was also there in the Russian Revolution"!

We were dumbfounded to hear an authoritative Spartacist spokesperson put on an equal plane the possibility of "betrayal" by the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 and Brezhnev's corrupt Stalinist bureaucracy sixty-odd years later. We presume that you disown responsibility for this remark—but it is an example of the confusion created even among your own cadres by blurring the bloodline between Stalinism and Trotskyism.

Comrade Miriam also suggested that the idea of sending Trotskyist brigades to Vietnam during the war could have been "considered." We would advise anyone considering such a proposal to first read "Trotskyism and Stalinism in

Vietnam," an excellent pamphlet containing materials produced by the Spartacist League in 1973, when it was still an authentically Trotskyist organization. The reason that there was virtually no indigenous Vietnamese Trotskyist movement at the time of the Vietnam war was because it had been *physically liquidated* by Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietnamese Stalinists, for the "crime" of leading tens of thousands of workers in the 1945 Saigon uprising. The conclusion drawn in the article which appeared in the 25 May 1973 issue of *Workers Vanguard* parallels our approach to Afghanistan:

"The Spartacist League has *consistently*, throughout its history, called for military defense of the NLF/DRV... At the same time, as Trotskyists we hold high the banner of permanent revolution and expose the repeated betrayals of the Vietnamese Stalinists."

In our letter of 16 March we pointed out that had the Partisan Defense Committee's hypothetical Afghan "brigade" ever been a serious proposal, instead of a cheap publicity stunt, it could have proved extremely dangerous for "Trotskyists" to have placed themselves under the "control and direction" of Najibullah, whose organization has a history of bloody purges of its own dissenting members. Miriam's response to this once again revealed the anti-Trotskyist logic implicit in "hailing" the Stalinists. She drew a parallel from the 1920 Russo-Polish war when Stalin, who did not want to be under the military discipline of Trotsky and Tukhachevsky, ignored their instructions and went south to Lvov. "And look what happened there" said Miriam, referring to the defeat of the Red Army at the battle of the Vistula. Unlike the undisciplined Stalin, the PDC presumably intended to closely adhere to any instructions it received. But once again Miriam was equating a Stalinist (Najibullah, the PDC's hypothetical commander) with Trotsky and Tukhachevsky, the Bolshevik military leadership.

There is a connection between all these mistakes. "Hailing" the policies of the Stalinist rulers in the Kremlin is politically counterposed to Trotsky's conception of them as a treacherous and profoundly conservative caste—a parasitic growth on the proletarian property forms. Instead of correcting your original mistaken formulation over Afghanistan now that it is obvious that the Kremlin bureaucrats have betrayed, you insist that you were right all along. And so comrade Miriam, grasping for arguments to justify this, draws a parallel between Lenin and Trotsky's party on the one hand and the Brezhnev and Najibullah leadership on the other as leaders with the potential for betrayal, but whose military discipline should nonetheless be upheld. This is not Trotskyism.

Fraternally,

Tom Riley for the Bolshevik Tendency

## Document 2c.8

### Worldwide Effort for Jalalabad Tops \$40,000

*The following is excerpted from an article in Workers Vanguard, No. 480, 23 June 1989*

In early February, as the Soviet army completed its withdrawal, with basic social gains at stake, the PDC wrote the Afghan Embassy with “the urgent offer to organize an international brigade to fight to the death in defense of these rights in Afghanistan.” This offer raised eyebrows and sneers from some, including a few who claimed to support the Soviet army fight against the *mujahedin*. But our offer came straight out of our revolutionary heritage. Scores of Trotskyists fought in the trenches of the Spanish Civil War, with the Lenin Column on the Aragon front, for example. The founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938 sent a message of

“greetings to the Fighters in Spain” which said in part:

“It [the conference] recalls with pride that the first effective practical aid in the form of volunteers, while the Popular Front parties were still babbling away about neutrality, was given by the sections of the Fourth International, particularly the French and the Belgian sections. It salutes its members who fell in the first days of the fight against Franco.”

In response to our offer to organize international brigades the Afghan government said military assistance was not needed at this time. Then, a few weeks later, it approached us with an appeal for humanitarian assistance for the besieged civilians of Jalalabad who were in desperate need of food, medicine and clothing. ■

## Document 2c.9

### Report From Heroic Jalalabad: Front Line Afghanistan Crush CIA's Mujahedin

*Reprinted from Workers Vanguard, No. 482, 21 July 1989*

**From Our Correspondent in Afghanistan**

JALALABAD, July 7—Thousands of people thronged through the streets of this revitalized city today to celebrate an important military victory over the CIA's *mujahedin* (holy warriors). Two days ago, the armed forces of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government, spearheaded by an armored Special Guard unit and heavily backed by the Air Force, forced the counterrevolutionaries to pull back to positions they occupied before the March offensive against Jalalabad.

Not only has the months-long bitter siege been broken, but Jalalabad and the surrounding parts of Nangarhar Province of which it is the capital are once again secure from the threat of rocket attacks. The rout of the *mujahedin* was so sweeping that the initial impulse of advance elements of the armored unit was to roll all the way up to Torkham, on the border with Pakistan. But the order came from the High Command to consolidate their positions before advancing further.

This reporter was with the first group of journalists to visit Jalalabad since May, and only the second visit since the *mujahedin* siege began in March. It was particularly moving to be here on behalf of the international campaign of humanitarian assistance conducted by the Partisan Defense Committee and fraternal legal and social defense organizations in other countries which raised over \$42,000 to aid the civilian victims of the siege. The English-language *Kabul Times* (3 July) and the Dari-language *Payam* (2 July) had both carried articles reporting on a message of acknowledgment from the Nangarhar Province Defence Council to the PDC. Part of the message quoted by the *Kabul Times* read:

“The Defence Council of Nangarhar Province representing all the PDPA members, social organizations and the peaceloving people of Nangarhar, cordially thank you and express gratitude for the assistance extended by you, assuring you honourable friends that it is a must that we would triumph, for we are struggling for a just right.”

The front has now been pushed back to Samarkhel, some 12-15 kilometers further east, a key fortified outpost that was the scene of heavy fighting in March and again now. We were taken by bus to Samarkhel. A few kilometers away, we could see a tank firing shell after shell over a ridge, along which some Afghan soldiers were advancing. This ridge is the *mujahedin's* only natural defense line for many miles, but there was no sign that they were holding their own or fighting back.

The officers and soldiers of the Special Guard unit proudly showed us around, describing the weapons captured, while warning us to stick to the areas that have already been cleared of mines—i.e., where a tank tread has left its “signature.” We could see the damaged buildings of the housing complex, the school and the shop, and visit the big diesel power station.

#### A City of Determination

At the head of the line of march of today's victory celebration was an armored car atop which rode our team of journalists. Following the military and civilian leaders of the city came dozens of multicolored banners and Afghan national flags and some five to ten thousand residents of Jalalabad. People were everywhere in the streets. There was not a sign of fear, but rather an evident determination which exploded in loud chants of “Afghanistan Zindabad!” (Long Live Afghanistan) and “Marg ya Watan” (Death or Country) that punctuated the march throughout. Young and old, women and men—many carrying their weapons—Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus joined together in this march from Jamhuriat Garden to Pashtoonistan Square.

After listening to a speech by Lt. Gen. Manookay Mangal, governor and chairman of the Defence Council of Nangarhar Province, the participants adopted a resolution “expressing all-out solidarity with the victorious and heroic armed forces in the defence of homeland, independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the country.” The roofs of the mainly two-story houses along the route of the march were

guarded by young militiamen (some appeared to be no older than 13), their Kalashnikovs slung over their shoulders looking almost too big for them.

From the helicopter and from the road, it was clear that Jalalabad, once renowned as a tourist resort for its beauty and greenery, is a wounded city, whose scars will take a long time to heal. The ravages of the brutal war against the population can be seen in torn walls, damaged houses, smashed windowpanes and roads full of ditches and debris. Between March and July, 973 houses were damaged along with 150 government buildings, shops and markets, mosques and temples. Many of the houses are made of mud bricks—making them relatively easy to rebuild—and the people have been working hard at repairing them.

The airport, some five kilometers to the east of the city, shows all the signs of the fierce battle that went on around and for it in March and April: hangars blown apart, the airstrip damaged, remains of jeeps and helicopters lying around, the control tower heavily damaged. It's clear that there has been no time to care for the niceties of appearance: the airport is functional again and that's enough.

The civilian population has suffered terribly: 1,993 injured and 1,002 killed, half of them children. On the single day of March 8, the *mujahedin* cutthroats, bankrolled by the Pakistani ISI [Inter-Service Intelligence] and the CIA, bombarded Jalalabad with 5,000 rockets. But they did not succeed in overwhelming its heroic defenders.

At the Central Hotel we met some of the civilian victims of these rocket attacks. Among them was Hayatullah, aged 14, a bright kid who lost his right leg in February. He had been afraid of rockets, he said. When one hit his home in the eastern district of Jalalabad, a brother was killed and another lost his leg. Hayatullah was a student at the time and wanted to become a teacher. With the stern look of a young man who had to grow up a lot faster than kids his age in luckier parts of the world, he asserted his resolve to complete his studies, because he very much wants "to teach small children." When asked how he felt about those who did this to him, he replied, "They should all be eliminated," adding that "America" is ultimately responsible as the country that supplies the rockets.

### An Internationalist Struggle

Toward the end of our eight-hour stay in Jalalabad we met the governor. After the deputy governor, who was accompanying the team of journalists, learned that this reporter was a representative of the PDC campaign, he made it known to the governor. When we entered the room for the press conference, Lt. Gen. Mangal shook hands with every reporter, but embraced me enthusiastically, saying "Ah, Partisan."

A doctor by profession, the 41-year-old former chief of political affairs of the interior ministry in Kabul has been governor of this crucial border province for six months. He said that "Pakistani militarists and the U.S. ambassador in Islamabad decided to declare war on Jalalabad on the 6th of March." The reactionaries—with a total of 40,000 troops, including two Pakistani tank battalions and 120 units of "reactive artillery"—were supposed to occupy Jalalabad in 72 hours; planes were ready in Peshawar to bring the *mujahedin* "provisional government" onto Afghan territory. "But they could not occupy the city," Lt. Gen. Mangal declared proudly. "Nangarhar men and women fought valiantly," including PDC members as well as the military, he added. The Air Force played a major role in the defeat of the attackers.

I asked the governor if the defenders and people of Jalalabad are aware that in many countries of the world, working people are following their struggle with extreme concern. "Certainly," he replied, adding that the struggle of the Afghan

people is an "internationalist struggle." Mangal mentioned specifically Pakistan's plan to dismember Afghanistan and to impose a government that would join with Pakistan and Turkey in a "new CENTO" anti-Soviet and anti-Indian U.S.-dominated alliance. He again thanked the PDC for our efforts in support of the people of Jalalabad. The international aid campaign clearly boosted morale in Jalalabad. The message from the Defence Council said, "Your great and humane move is so noteworthy that no devilish eyes can dare see it."

In the course of these three months of fighting, the defenders of Jalalabad had lost some 800 killed. But using a combination of high-level bombing by converted propeller-driven Antonov AN-12 cargo planes—which can fly above the range of the U.S.-supplied Stinger missiles—and long-range SCUD missiles fired from the Kabul area, the Afghan armed forces have inflicted far heavier losses on the enemy. At a July 3 press conference in Kabul, Gen. Alumi, head of the military section of the PDPA and secretary of the Supreme Defence Council, explained that the counterrevolutionaries have taken more casualties between March and June than "in any previous two years of fighting taken together." He gave a figure of 35,000 *mujahedin* casualties (including 3,000 Pakistanis) since the signing of the Geneva agreement in 1988.

Bakhtar News Agency (5 July), reporting a meeting between bereaved Afghan mothers and a delegation of Pakistani journalists, quoted one mother saying: "We were pleased with the signing of the Geneva accords, we thought that in the light of these agreements war in the Republic of Afghanistan could be stopped.... But unfortunately after the signing of the accords, war in the Republic of Afghanistan has further intensified." In fact, Gorbachev's pullout has served only to embolden the imperialists and their cutthroats.

The Soviet intervention in 1979 was mandated by defense of the gains of the 1917 October Revolution and opened up the prospect of extending those gains to Afghanistan; that is why the international Spartacist tendency, now the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), proclaimed "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" After the Soviet withdrawal, Washington and Islamabad thought the instant the Soviet troops pulled out, the Afghan government would crumble. They have been proved wrong by the fighting valor of the Afghan people.

Meanwhile, the PDPA's policy of "national reconciliation" aims at luring the reactionaries into a coalition. Kabul papers regularly report agreements with regional *mujahedin* commanders, effectively leaving them in control of their fiefdoms. The day after *Payam* reported on the internationalist aid campaign by the PDC, it carried a speech by the foreign minister headlined, "Except a Political Settlement—No Other Way Exists for Putting an End to War in Afghanistan."

But to put an end to the imperialist-backed war against social progress requires rooting out—not conciliating—entrenched feudal and capitalist reaction through workers revolution. In the extremely backward conditions of Afghanistan, the tiny industrial proletariat does not have the weight to effect a fundamental transformation of society. But next door in Bhutto's Pakistan, the home base for the CIA's *mujahedin*, conditions for social revolution are brewing, with national minorities in turmoil and the regime divided. In Iran, the Islamic theocracy is now headless and the population sick of a decade of bloody war and domestic terror.

Jalalabad besieged was the focal point of imperialism's *ji-had* (holy war) against social progress and the Soviet Union. Jalalabad victorious can inspire revolutionary struggle throughout the region, from India to Turkey. That requires above all the program of Leninist internationalism, the banner of the International Communist League. ■

## BT Cringes on Afghanistan Defense

Reprinted from Workers Vanguard No. 482, 21 July 1989

Over the past decade Western imperialism waged a hysterical campaign against Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. For the anti-Soviet left, which quickly fell into line with the Carter/Reagan Cold War hysteria, our slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" was anathema. After assiduously trying to duck the issue, last year the renegades of the so-called Bolshevik Tendency (BT) finally fessed up that they hated our angular Soviet-defensist stand. But they tried to cover their tracks by claiming to give "military support to the Soviets and their allies" against the CIA's *mujahedin* cut-throats (see "BT Protests Too Much," WV No. 453, 20 May 1988, Document 2b.3).

After Gorbachev treacherously withdrew Soviet troops last winter in order to appease U.S. imperialism, the Partisan Defense Committed (PDC) offered "to organize an international brigade to fight to the death" on the side of social freedom in Afghanistan. The BT response (1917, Summer 1989) was to ridicule the PDC offer as "bizarre," a cynical "publicity stunt," deriding the "utter unreality of the proposal." Alleging the "extremely unfavorable military and political situation" after the Soviet pullout, these gutless wonders went further, rejecting fighting under the military discipline of Stalinists. So much for the BT's "military support"!

Although the Kabul government declined the offer of an international brigade as militarily unnecessary at this time, shortly thereafter it proposed that the PDC participate in an international campaign to raise money for the victims of the siege of Jalalabad. In two months over \$40,000 was raised. This rather surprising amount is testament to the increasing international solidarity, in particular among immigrant communities, for the embattled people of Afghanistan fighting imperialist-backed terrorists. But this is meaningless to the BT, who cannot comprehend a world view other than seen through the prism of imperialist anti-Sovietism. Indeed, the BT did not cough up one red cent for the PDC's Jalalabad Civilian Victims Aid Fund.

Behind the BT's cringing over Afghanistan is Stalinophobia. They make it utterly clear that if the Afghan government itself had appealed for an international military brigade, they would have said no:

"...it could have proved physically extremely hazardous for young militants (or guilt-ridden ex-members) identified with a 'Trotskyist' organization to place themselves under the 'control and direction' of the PDPA [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan]—a Stalinist organization with a history of bloody purges within its own ranks."

—1917, Summer 1989

By extension, the BT is here saying it will *never* engage in military actions under Stalinist-led forces against counterrevolution and imperialism.

The BT's entire line on Afghanistan is an adaption to rad-lib anti-Sovietism. This becomes quite clear if you compare it to their line on Nicaragua. Politically there is *no essential difference* between the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and the Afghan PDPA. Both are radical petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes allied to the Soviet Union. A few years ago we undertook a successful campaign to raise money to aid the Nicaraguan government against the CIA-organized contras. A number of our comrades and sympathizers have gone to Nicaragua on work brigades under the control and direction of the Sandinista authorities.

But the BT has not (yet) denounced these activities. Why

not? Because there is general sympathy for the Sandinistas against the contras in the North American rad-lib milieu and pseudo-Trotskyist circles. But these same left liberals and fake-Trotskyists were violently hostile to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and have been generally supportive of the *mujahedin*. Hence the BT's anti-Soviet double standard on Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

The BT line on Afghanistan reeks of "Third Campism." In opposing the SL slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" they asked rhetorically if we thought that "Trotskyists should have been 'hailing' the Stalinist apparatus" in the struggle against the Nazis. In fact, during World War II the Trotskyists certainly did hail the victories of the Red Army against Nazi Germany. In a 1942 speech commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, James P. Cannon declared:

"I say the whole world has been taken by surprise, including Stalin, who had no more confidence in the Red Army than he had in the power of the Soviet economy, than he has in the revolutionary powers of the workers generally. The Trotskyists were not taken by surprise. Trotsky predicted that imperialist attack on the Soviet Union would unleash marvels of proletarian enthusiasm and fighting capacity in the Red Army. He could do that because he, better than others, understood that the great motive power of the victorious revolution had not all been expended. *The Red Army that the world hails is an army created by a proletarian revolution.*"

—*Speeches for Socialism* (1971) [our emphasis]

In the same issue of 1917 which ridicules the proposal for an international brigade for Afghanistan, there is a polemic against the slogan "The Klan Doesn't Ride in Moscow" [see appendix]. We raised this slogan in mass labor/black mobilizations, initiated by the Spartacist League, which have in several cities stopped the Klan/Nazis over the past decade. The BT points to the ominous public emergence of the nativist fascists of Pamyat in Gorbachev's Russia. "Strictly speaking," says 1917, "the Klan doesn't ride in Moscow; but then, Pamyat doesn't ride in Washington."

What does the BT care? When we mobilized to stop the Klan from riding in Washington in November 1982 they were nowhere to be found. In fact, they demanded that instead we should have concentrated our efforts on the Canadian Chrysler strike. Now they condemn a slogan which was an expression of Soviet defensism, albeit a shallow and one-sided view of the *contradictions* in Soviet society reflecting the isolation and degeneration of the world's first workers state.

In typical Third Campist fashion, the BT *equates* the role of fascist groups in racist, capitalist America and in the Soviet Union. This negates the conquests of the Russian Revolution, which crushed the anti-Semitic Black Hundreds. The Klan rides in the American South because there was a political counterrevolution which overturned Radical Reconstruction after the Civil War. The victory of this counterrevolution isn't just in the white sheets of the KKK but in the blue uniforms of the state's police who are the main source of racist terror and murder in the U.S.

Although Pamyat might be protected by some elements of the Kremlin bureaucracy, it would take a social counterrevolution to overthrow the gains of the October Revolution and resurrect capitalist exploitation for Pamyat to ride in Moscow. In its own pathetic little way, the BT undermines the defense of the Soviet Union. ■

## Document 2c.11

### On 'Hailing' Brezhnev's Afghan Policy

*Reprinted from 1917 No. 7, Winter 1990*

For well over a year, we have been involved in a continuing polemic with the Spartacists over the political adaptation to the Stalinist bureaucracy implicit in their slogan "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" We counterposed the slogan, "Military Victory to the Soviet Army!" The Spartacist League's latest polemic on this question appears in *Workers Vanguard*, 21 July. In this piece, the SL scribblers claim that, "during World War II the Trotskyists certainly did hail the victories of the Red Army against Nazi Germany." As proof they quote American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon's 1942 remark: "The Red Army that the world hails is an army created by a proletarian revolution." But, as anyone who can read can tell, *Cannon was not "hailing" anything*. He merely noted that after the Nazi attack on the USSR in 1941, "the world" (or more exactly that section of it that favored a victory of the Allies) was hailing the Soviet army. Cannon had touched on this point earlier in the same speech: "Churchill and Roosevelt pay hypocritical tribute today to 'the great Russian people' and 'the heroic Red Army'."

Cannon did not propose that the Fourth International should begin to "hail" (or pay tribute to) Stalin's military operations as the SL casuists suggest. Instead he adhered to the programmatic perspective laid down by Trotsky:

"During the military struggle against Hitler, the revolutionary workers will strive to enter into the closest possible comradely relations with the rank-and-file fighters of the Red Army. While arms in hand they deal blows to Hitler, the Bolshevik-Leninists will at the same time conduct revolutionary propaganda against Stalin preparing his overthrow at the next and perhaps very near stage.

"...Our defense of the USSR is carried on under the slogan: 'For Socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!'"

—*In Defense of Marxism*

While the CPUSA and its sister parties were "hailing" the Soviet military, the Trotskyists combined agitation for defense of the collectivized property of the USSR with calls for a political revolution *against* the bureaucracy. Cannon explained this in his speech:

"Our policy is the policy of the Russian section of the

Fourth International, which lives and fights. And they continue at their task—to defend the country, to rebuild the Bolshevik party, to revive the soviets and the trade unions, and to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy."

The question of "hailing" the Stalinist military came up in 1939 during the historic faction fight in the Socialist Workers Party against the revisionist opposition, led by Max Shachtman, which no longer wished to defend the USSR. Shachtman had a different agenda than the contemporary SL, but he shared their interest in blurring the line between political and military support to the USSR in conflicts with capitalist states. Thus he facetiously asked: if the USSR remained a workers state, "why does not the majority propose to hail the advance of the Red Army into Poland...." as revolutionaries had in Lenin's day. In response Trotsky explained quite clearly why the Fourth International did not propose to hail Stalin's Red Army:

"This newness in the situation [as compared to 1920] is the bankruptcy of the Third International, the degeneracy of the Soviet state, the development of the Left Opposition, and the creation of the Fourth International.... And these events explain sufficiently why we have radically changed our position toward the politics of the Kremlin, including its military politics."

—*In Defense of Marxism*

Afghanistan is not Poland. The social and economic integration of Afghanistan into the Soviet Union in the 1980s would have represented greater social progress for the Afghan masses than the incorporation of Poland into the USSR in 1939 would have meant for the Polish workers. But the reason that the Fourth International refused to "hail" the Red Army, while militarily supporting it against Hitler's armies, had nothing to do with Poland's level of economic and social development compared to the USSR—it was, as Trotsky made clear, because of the *political character* of the Stalinist bureaucracy which controlled the army. Fifty years later, Gorbachev's pullout from Afghanistan (a betrayal of Afghan women, leftists and others who placed their trust in the USSR) once again demonstrates the correctness of Trotsky's refusal to hail the "military politics" of the Stalinist ruling caste. ■

## Appendix

### Pamyat Rides in Moscow

*Reprinted from 1917 No. 6, 1989*

Not so long ago, one of the favorite slogans of the Spartacist League (SL) was "The Klan Doesn't Ride in Moscow!" It was intended to cut against anti-Sovietism among sectors of the American population hostile to the Ku Klux Klan—particularly blacks, but also radical youth and others. However well-intentioned, the slogan had a distinctly Stalinophilic quality, as the recent publicity exposing the rise of the fascistic, nativist Russian Pamyat organization underlines. Strictly speaking it is, of course, true that the Klan doesn't ride in Moscow; but then, Pamyat doesn't ride in Washington.

Pamyat, the modern-day successor to the anti-Semitic Black Hundreds, is alive and well in Moscow and has been since the early 1980s, when it was founded as an adjunct of

the USSR Ministry of the Aviation Industry. Pamyat enjoys considerable support from powerful elements in the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy and has been known to hold meetings in Communist Party premises in central Moscow.

Trotskyists have long been aware that the heterogeneous Stalinist ruling caste contains within it some of the most reactionary elements in Soviet society. In the Transitional Program, Trotsky referred to the "bourgeois-fascist grouping" in the CPSU as "the faction of Butenko." The SL's slogan falsely suggested that fascistic elements had been eradicated. This was one of a number of Stalinophilic deviations which this supposedly "Trotskyist" group has put forward in recent years. An example was the naming of one of its contingents on an anti-fascist demonstration the "Yuri Andropov Brigade" after the then-chief bureaucrat in the Kremlin, who had played a key role in the suppression of the Hungarian workers revolt of 1956. (When Andropov died in 1984 he

was given an “in memoriam” box on the front page of *Workers Vanguard* with a 75 percent approval rating.)

In recent months the Spartacist press has run several accounts of the alarming growth of Pamyat under glasnost, complete with calls on the Soviet workers to sweep them off

the streets. The boast about the Klan not riding in Moscow has been discreetly shelved. But thoughtful members of the Spartacist group should ask themselves how a supposedly Trotskyist organization could have raised such a slogan in the first place. ■

## Document 2c.12

### *Trotskyist Revolutionary Internationalism vs. Robertson's Bogus Brigade*

Reprinted from 1917 No. 7, 1990

In our previous issue, we commented on the Spartacist League's (SL) cynical “offer” to dispatch a military expedition to assist Najibullah and his People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). As it turned out, we were not the only ones to look askance at the mock heroics attending the imaginary Spartacist battalion. The eccentric left-Stalinists who publish the British *Leninist*, for example, observed that such expeditions are particularly easy to arrange “when there is not a snowball's chance in hell that the government in Kabul will take them up on the offer...”

Reservations about the advisability of the brigade gambit were widespread even within the Spartacist group itself. In France, dissension over this issue blew apart the group's only significant fusion in a decade (see accompanying article). But even in North America, the ranks were uneasy with the proposal. The SL leadership for its part has staked its prestige on the defense of its fake proposal, and charges that critics can only be motivated by “anti-communism.”

In fact, Spartacist guru James Robertson never intended to mobilize anyone for Afghanistan. This is demonstrated by the glib assertions of a variety of SL cadres that their contingent would have been largely recruited in *Pakistan*, under the nose of the *mujahedin* and their quartermasters! Unlike the SL tops, the cadres of the Fourth International were not in the business of trying to impress the uninitiated with pseudo-revolutionary posturing. Had anyone seriously suggested to Trotsky or Cannon in 1935 that the SWP organize a brigade in what was then Italian Somaliland (adjacent to Abyssinia) to intervene on the side of Haile Selassie in his fight against Mussolini, they probably would have been considered to be mentally ill. But the Robertsonites were of course not in earnest and never had any intention of opening a recruiting office in Peshawar or Karachi.

The 23 June issue of *Workers Vanguard* (WV) claimed that the SL's make-believe Kabul brigade “came straight out of our revolutionary heritage” and quoted a message from the 1938 founding conference of the Fourth International saluting the Trotskyist militants who participated in “the first days of the fight against Franco.” This attempt to equate the SL's cynical publicity stunt with the heroic intervention of the Trotskyists in Spain is absurd and disgraceful. Leaving aside for the moment the disparity between the genuine internationalism of the Trotskyists in the 1930s and the hollow grandstanding of the Spartacist leadership, the political situation in Spain in 1936 was qualitatively different from that of Afghanistan today. Abyssinia would in fact provide a much closer analogy.

During the first days of the Spanish Civil War (the period to which WV's citations refer), the objective conditions existed for the immediate victory of the *proletarian revolution*. In “The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning,” written in December 1937, Trotsky commented: “In its specific gravity in the country's economic life, in its political and cultural level, the Spanish proletariat stood on the first day of the rev-

olution not below but above the Russian proletariat at the beginning of 1917.” A revolutionary breakthrough by the Spanish workers could have changed the course of world history. Contemporary Afghanistan, on the other hand, is a country which, as we wrote in 1917 No. 5: “is so monumentally backward that the working class does not exist as a significant social force. In this situation, *some* kind of outside intervention is necessary to emancipate the Afghan masses from quasi-feudal despotism.” But the posturing of the Robertsonites is not going to emancipate anybody.

The Trotskyist militants who fought against Franco simultaneously agitated politically within the Republican militias for a break with the class-collaborationist popular front, for the consolidation of working-class power and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. After the initial revolutionary upsurge of the Spanish working class had been derailed by a combination of anarcho-reformist misleadership and murderous Stalinist police terror, Trotsky quite categorically opposed a policy of simple “support” to the anti-revolutionary Republicans:

“Will we, as a revolutionary party, mobilize new volunteers for Negrin? That would be to send them into the hands of the GPU. Collect money for the Negrin government? Absurd! We will collect money for our own comrades in Spain. If we send comrades across the border, it will be conspiratorially, for our own movement.”

—“Answer to Questions...” 14 September 1937

However, the Trotskyists were certainly not neutral in the Spanish civil war. While they militarily defended the popular-front government against Franco, they did not for a moment soften their criticisms of the Republicans. Nor did they pledge anything but extremely conditional obedience to their bloc partners:

“We have not the slightest confidence in the capacity of this government to conduct the war and assure victory. We accuse this government of protecting the rich and starving the poor. This government must be smashed. So long as we are not strong enough to replace it, we are fighting under its command. But on every occasion we express openly our nonconfidence in it; it is the only possible way to mobilize the masses *politically* against this government and to prepare its overthrow. Any other politics would be a betrayal of the revolution.”

—*Ibid.*

This has an entirely different flavor than the Robertsonites' hypothetical pledge to put themselves under the “control and direction” of the petty-bourgeois Stalinist PDPA of Najibullah.

### On Picking Coffee in Nicaragua

The SL leadership has obviously been feeling some political pressure over the question of its phony proposal. Accordingly, a WV hack was assigned to crank out a response (of sorts) to our letter of 16 March. This piece, entitled “BT

Cringes on Afghanistan Defense,” appeared in the July 21 issue of *WV*. It defensively suggested that the SL’s Afghan offer was really little different than the participation of Spartacist members on various coffee-picking “brigades” to Nicaragua. *WV* noted, “the BT has not (yet) denounced these activities. Why not?” Well, for one thing, the SLers who went to Nicaragua did so as individual members of the various rad-lib coffee-picking excursions encouraged by the Sandinistas. The Nicaraguan brigades therefore lacked the farcical quality of the Robertsonite offer to Najibullah of an imaginary brigade to “fight to the death.” SL members have as much right as anyone to join with the assorted radicals, liberals and Christians picking coffee and having their pictures taken with FSLN soldiers.

We respect the subjective commitment of the thousands of decent individuals who journeyed to Nicaragua in order to take a stand in defense of the revolution against the system of imperialist piracy and human misery. Some of them, like Ben Linder, lost their lives at the hands of Reagan’s contra cut-throats. But organizations which purport to represent the revolutionary continuity of Lenin and Trotsky must be judged by a different standard than the thousands of “sandalistas” who travelled to Managua. And by that criterion the SL’s Nicaraguan work leaves plenty to be desired.

In 1964, when SL cadre Shirley Stoute joined a brigade to Cuba, she did not simply harvest sugar cane; she attempted to make contact with the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR), the only organization in Cuba which identified itself with Trotsky. Her report, which appeared in *Spartacist* No. 3, was the first to publicize the persecution of these comrades by the bonapartist Castro regime. Stoute’s activity, at the height of Castro’s popularity in the American left, demonstrated how seriously the early SL took its revolutionary internationalist responsibilities.

A decade later, during the massive popular upheavals in Portugal in 1974-75, *WV* correspondents attentively followed developments of the complex and fluid political situation and paid particular attention to the organized “far left.” The SL journalists were not merely interpreting the world but actually struggling to *change* it by seeking to engage, influence and ultimately win over the most advanced elements of the Portuguese left to Trotskyism.

Unfortunately the SL of the 1980s is not the same organization that it once was. The SL leaders no longer believe in the program for which they once fought and to which they still nominally adhere. The various accounts by SL “brigadistas” who visited Nicaragua contained a token sentence or two of leftist criticism, but they generally had the flavor of vapid rad-lib travelogues. *WV* showed little interest in the groups to the left of the FSLN and paid scant attention to developments in the Nicaraguan working class.

*WV* attempts to cite the SL’s Nicaraguan activity to justify its Afghan proposal. Yet the passive and essentially adaptive character of its intervention in Nicaragua demonstrated how far it has moved from the revolutionary internationalism of its past. The Nicaraguan revolution, although it took place in a small country and was beset from the beginning by immense objective difficulties, could have represented a potent revolutionary factor in the increasingly volatile social situation in Latin America, ravaged by Wall Street loan sharks and the IMF. The massive and semi-spontaneous participation of hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguan workers and poor people in the 1979 insurrection which destroyed the bourgeois state gave Nicaragua a special significance for Marxists, and created a political space for working-class politics which did not exist in the aftermath of the revolutions in Cuba, China or Yugoslavia. In Nicaragua, unlike in Afghanistan, a genuinely Leninist organization of even a few score could have gained a

significant mass base and become a real factor in the outcome of the revolution.

Of course the SL is not large or powerful, and the impact of any organization is limited by its resources. But the point is, the SL did not make a serious attempt. Dozens of SL members made it down to Nicaragua. But when they got there, instead of attempting to function as Shirley Stoute had in 1964, they confined themselves to the role of leftist solidarity activists. Despite its formal positions, it is clear that the Spartacist leadership no longer believes in the possibility of a political breakthrough by the proletariat in Central America (or anywhere else). Even where their paper positions retain an “orthodox” character, the commitment to struggle for the victory of the Marxist program no longer guides the activity of the group.

### Spartacist League in Afghanistan

The same issue of *WV* which contains the defense of the Afghan brigade stunt also features a report of one Robertsonite’s trip to Jalalabad to present funds raised by the SL’s Partisan Defense Committee (PDC) for the relief of the victims of *mujahedin* terror. Leftists side militarily with the PDPA and their supporters against the imperialist backed tribalist reactionaries. But the *WV* dispatch is written in a style reminiscent of Jack Barnes’ *Militant*. Apparently the *WV* correspondent dashed off the account shortly after dismounting from atop an armored car “at the head of the line of march of today’s victory celebration” in Jalalabad, which may account for its breathless style. The article triumphantly refers to a “message of acknowledgement from the Nangarhar Province Defence Council to the PDC.” Indeed, according to the *WV* account, the PDPA did more than just acknowledge the Spartacists, it positively *hailed* them as: “real friends of the Afghan people, supporters of peace and love with human-being.” High praise indeed!

Besides riding on an armored car, the highlight of the PDC/SL reporter’s visit to Jalalabad seems to have been a meeting with the governor. Unlike the other correspondents, who had to be satisfied with handshakes, the *WV* representative was *embraced*! This intimacy afforded the opportunity for a searching question to Najibullah’s deputy: “I asked the governor if the defenders and people of Jalalabad are aware that in many countries of the world, working people are following their struggle with extreme concern.” The governor replied in the affirmative and once more thanked the PDC. End of interview.

All very friendly and cordial. But in writing this up, the correspondent (or perhaps the *WV* editor) decided that it might be wise to project a more critical demeanor, and accordingly tacked on a paragraph chastising the PDPA for conciliating reaction and for its willingness to leave the *mujahedin* contras “in control of their fiefdoms.” No doubt the correspondent was too busy embracing and exchanging pleasantries with the governor to raise such trifles while actually on the spot.

The SL leadership’s gratitude for the “acknowledgement” of the Afghan Stalinists, like its “hailing” of Leonid Brezhnev’s military intervention in the first place, derives from its abandonment of the Trotskyist program which it once upheld. This is not an unprecedented development. Those who despair of the historic possibility of the working class, led by a conscious Trotskyist vanguard, successfully intervening to change history, have often sought alternative agencies of social progress.

Some of the SL’s leftist critics assert that the Robertsonites have acquired a Stalinophilic character. Certainly parading around as the “Yuri Andropov Brigade,” “hailing” the Soviet army and hanging a picture of Polish Stalinist General Jaruzelski in the group’s New York headquarters, would seem

to lend credence to such an interpretation. But to see the SL as Stalinophilic is to mistake appearance for essence.

The fact is that the SL's much-vaunted Soviet defensism is only skin deep. In the past decade it has often been thrown overboard when a posture of Soviet defensism was likely to incur the displeasure of the American ruling class. When the Soviets downed the KAL-007 spy plane in 1983 as it flew over their most sensitive military installations, the SL rushed to assert that, "If the government of the Soviet Union knew that the intruding aircraft was in fact a commercial passenger plane," then, "*despite the potential military damage of such an apparent spying mission*" shooting it down "would have been *worse than a barbaric atrocity*" (emphasis added). Likewise, when the U.S. shuttle Challenger self-destructed in 1986 during a mission for the U.S. military in conjunction with the anti-Soviet Star Wars program, the SL joined the Reagan administration in characterizing as "tragic" the loss of six Reaganauts.

The primary concern of the SL leadership is no longer programmatic consistency but rather safeguarding the material

assets of the group and guaranteeing the creature comforts of the *lider maximo*. This is not to deny that the SL leadership retains an interest in "high Trotskyism," and particularly in archival pursuits related to it. Robertson himself undoubtedly retains residual interest in things political. Besides, a certain amount of big "P" politics is necessary to hold an ostensibly Marxist group together and ensure that the dues base is regularly replenished.

The SL's initial fake offer of a Kabul brigade, and the necessarily abysmal quality of the arguments advanced to defend it, cannot be attributed to a lack of experience or political sophistication, or even to a skewed perception of reality. Today the overriding characteristic of the political bandits who run the SL is *cynicism*, a quality which marks the once-revolutionary Spartacist League as one of the nastier cultist outfits on the American left. And Robertson's hypothetical brigade for Kabul (which we suggested he might want to name after Leonid Brezhnev whose Afghan policies the SL continues to insist on "hailing") is, above all, cynical. ■

