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The U.S. Deserves to Lose in Iraq — But Should We "Support the Iraqi Resistance"?

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Part I
A USA Anarchist Opinion on the Iraqi War

The U. S. A. deserves to be militarily defeated in Iraq. It should be forced to withdraw from that country. The U.S. is waging a war of aggression, invading and occupying a country that did it no harm and had been no threat, overthrowing its government, killing tens of thousands of its people, including civilians, torturing others, remaining in the country even after overthrowing its government, violating the wishes of most of its people, trying to sell off its oil, and planning to maintain U.S. military bases there for a long time... All this was justified by a campaign of lies about Weapons of Mass Destruction and about ties to terrorism. If international law means anything at all, this is an illegal war. This vile war of aggression should be lost! (I am concentrating on the war in Iraq here, although these arguments would mostly apply also to U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. and its support for the Israeli state against the Palestinians.)

The more thoroughly this vicious war is defeated, the less likely the U.S. government will be to attack other countries. This war has been announced as only the beginning of a series of wars by which the U.S. state threatens nations around the world, such as Iran, Syria, and North Korea. The U.S. state has declared a never-ending War on Terror. Ever since the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, the government has felt handicapped by the so-called Vietnam Syndrome, that is, the reluctance of the U.S. population to support military interventions. The terrorist crime of September 11 eroded this reluctance and was used as an excuse to engage in aggressions which inner circles had long wanted to carry out anyway. A big defeat in Iraq will decrease the willingness of U.S. workers to support aggression by the government. This would protect people everywhere in the world.

This does not imply any hostility to the ranks of the U.S. military forces, mainly soldiers or Marines. After all, they did not decide to invade Iraq. It was not their choice. Probably most joined the military for economic reasons (the so-called poverty draft). Many do not support the war. Of those in the Reserves or National Guard, almost none expected to be fighting in a foreign war. It is in their interests for U.S. forces to be withdrawn as soon as possible. Furthermore, if the U.S. is so defeated that it is unlikely to soon wage war on other countries, this would be in the interests of these and future U.S. military ranks who would otherwise be put in harm's way in such wars.

Nor does this imply any political support for the leadership of the Iraqi resistance. Probably most of the fighters in the resistance (also called insurgents) are motivated by a just desire to get rid of foreign occupiers. The movement is heterogeneous. But their leadership seems to be mostly Islamicist authoritarians, who want to establish a theocratic dictatorship and are explicitly pro-capitalist. They are in alliance with Ba'athists, supporters of pseudosocialist nationalist dictatorship. Both groupings are antiunion and antiworking class; the Islamicists are also viciously against rights for women. Both tendencies have much in common with fascism. Their methods include legitimate attacks on foreign

troops and the forces of the puppet regime, but also terrorist attacks on Iraqi civilians. There would be no great advantage for the Iraqi people if such forces get to establish their state.

Our sympathies should be with those Iraqis who work to build labor unions, organizations of the unemployed, and women's organizations — working against both the U.S. occupation and the main leadership of the resistance.

Why We Should Focus on the U.S.

There are two reasons I concentrate on the U.S. government, rather than on the nature of the Iraqi resistance or the Sadam regime before that. The first is that I am a U.S. citizen. The U.S. state claims to speak in my name and the name of my fellow citizens. This gives us a responsibility to oppose it. Practically, we have a greater chance to influence the U.S. state than other states — not by presenting nice, rational, arguments to the U.S. rulers but by building a mass movement against its warmaking. It is easier to condemn the governments of countries on the other side of the world, especially those that are the enemies of the U.S. state (such as Sadam was, or the potential state of the resistance). It is more difficult to fight against the ruling regime of our own society. But this is what most needs to be done.

Secondly, the U.S. state is the most powerful in the world and the servant of the richest ruling class on earth. It drains wealth from all nations. With its mighty military, it is the bully of the planet. It backs dictatorships and authoritarian pseudodemocracies throughout the world. Contrary to the view that the world is now smooth and that imperialism is over, there remains a distinction between the rich, imperialist states and the poor, oppressed nations, And the United States is the main imperialist.

These two points also apply, properly modified, to militants in other imperialist countries, essentially in Canada, Western Europe, and Japan. Their main task is also to oppose their own immediate states. They need to fight against the U.S., the center of world imperialism, but their rulers are imperialists in their own right. The imperialist states are junior partners of the U.S., both economically (sharing in the loot from the oppressed nations) and militarily. For example, while the Canadian state proclaims its idealism in not sending troops to Iraq, it does send troops to Afghanistan, which frees the U.S. state to send more forces to Iraq. At the same time, these other imperialists have their own interests, which they sometimes assert against the U.S. (especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union).

From time to time the U.S. may seem to do something good for the local people; it may stop genocide or ethnic cleansing in Kosovo or in Kurdish Iraq; it may overthrow a local dictator such as Saddam or restore Aristide to power in Haiti. I would not condemn the Kosovars or Kurds, for example, from taking advantage of such protection. However, the U.S. state does this for its own reasons, not really for the good of the people. Any people it seems to benefit should be warned about this. The U.S. state has continued to oppose national self-determination for the Kosovars and the Kurds (and has repeatedly betrayed the Kurds in the past). It overthrew the murderous and torturing regime of Saddam to create its own murderous and torturing regime. It restored Aristide. . . and then overthrew him. In any case, none of these apparently good

acts of the U.S. should not be used to justify the support of the U.S. empire by U.S. people.

There are certain implications of focusing our fight against the U.S. empire (and its imperialist allies). Our main task is to demand that the U.S. military and its fake coalition immediately and unconditionally leave Iraq (and leave Afghanistan and withdraw all support from Israel). We should demand that the U.S. state cease all support for the supposed laws it has saddled Iraq with, which were to keep the Iraqi economy under U.S. control. It should abandon all bases in Iraq and the Middle East. It should offer financial reparations for the damage it has done to Iraq, to be given to whatever governing entity the Iraqis organize. None of this should be dependent on what the Iraqis do or do not do. How the Iraqis organize themselves is none of the business of the U.S. government.

Many people say that U.S. troops should be replaced by other troops, such as UN soldiers or NATO troops. But the UN and NATO are dominated by the U.S. Even aside from this, they are dominated by other imperialist states who would be no improvement over the U.S. In any case, the occupation of Iraq by any foreign forces at all would deny the Iraqi people their right to self-determination. This would be true even of the proposal that Iraq be occupied by troops from other Muslim countries. The Iraqi people have the right to settle their own differences and take care of themselves.

Some liberals propose a graduated pullout by the U.S., perhaps setting a date by which it promises to complete the withdrawal. This proposal also denies the Iraqis their self-determination. It implies that the U.S. state has the right to remain in Iraq until it decides to end its occupation, on its own terms. This approach sets up a situation where the U.S. rulers could announce that they had planned to withdraw — as the whole world knows — but circumstances have changed and they have to stay in a while longer. Instead, the movement must insist on a program of immediate and unconditional withdrawal!

The Iraqis are under the guns of the U.S. and its friends. They may chose to negotiate with the U.S. Many have chosen to participate in the governing structures set up by the U.S. military, including being part of the U.S.-managed elections. At least the ranks of these participants apparently thought that this was the best way to get rid of U.S. rule. As internationalists, U.S. militants may agree or disagree with such tactics. But in no way does this justify our letting up our complete opposition to U.S. intervention in Iraq. Whatever some Iraqis feel that they are forced to do, the movement inside the U.S. must insist that the U.S. get out of Iraq.

Political Implications of Focusing First on Opposing the U.S. Empire

Most of the U.S. antiwar movement has accepted the need for immediate U.S. withdrawal, using slogans such as Bring the Troops Home Now! (There are those who originally opposed the war but who now are for continuing it, supposedly to prevent an Iraqi civil war. These do not take part in the antiwar movement.) However, there are certain implications which most of the movement does not yet draw.

If we are completely against U.S. imperialism then we should completely reject any politicians who support that empire. The war on the Iraqis is not the result of a mistake by a few politicians. The war is the logical outcome of the attempts of the U.S. state to continue to dominate the world in the interests of U.S. big business. No doubt mistakes have been made, in terms of U.S. interests; nor was it inevitable that the U.S. would have gone to war at this time, in this place. But war somewhere, at some time, was inevitable. The politicians who have served U.S. imperial interests have not been all of one party, the Republicans. On the contrary, the years of embargo and bombing which followed the first Gulf war and preceded this one were administered by the Democrats under President Clinton. When this President Bush launched his war, it was endorsed by almost all the Democratic politicians. In the 2004 presidential election, the Democrats outdid the Republicans by calling for more troops for Iraq. The election was between two pro-war candidates.

More generally, the Democrats, who are seen by many antiwar activists as the party of peace, are as committed to empire and war as the Republicans. The Democrats led the U.S. into World War I and II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. They are as dedicated to a large military force, nuclear, world-destroying, missiles, overseas military bases, global power politics, and the profitability of U.S. international businesses. They do not deny this — rather they insist on it. (On the Middle East, historically the Democrats have been more hawkish in support of Israel than the Republicans.)

Yet, during the 2004 presidential election, the leaders of the U.S. peace movement virtually put the movement in mothballs. This was true not only of the out-and-out liberals but also of many radicals, people calling themselves socialists or communists. They did not challenge the Democrats over their support for the war. They did not call demonstrations against the war. They went all-out to elect the second of the two pro-war candidates. Even the Green Party adopted a program of implicitly supporting the imperialist Democratic candidate (by not challenging him in swing states where he had a chance). Of course, many ordinary people who disliked the war nevertheless supported the Democrats out of hatred of the vile George W. Bush. That is one thing. That this was done by people calling themselves radicals, even revolutionaries, was shameful.

There was also a minority of antiwar activists who rejected the Democrats but instead campaigned for Ralph Nader. Nader makes no secret of his support for U.S. capitalism (his program is for it to be better regulated by the national state). He did not advocate the complete withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq, instead supporting UN troops. That he was vigorously supported by people calling themselves revolutionary socialists and internationalists was also shameful.

[In Part II I discuss why we should not use the slogan, “support the Iraqi resistance.” I also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the typical anarchist position, as I see it.]

Part II

Should We "Support the Iraqi Resistance"?

In Part I of this essay, I argued that the U.S. war on Iraq, from the side of the U.S. and its allies (mainly the U.K.), is unjustifiable, an act of aggression, and imperialist . From the side of people in the imperialist countries such as the U.S., our position should be defeatist: we should give no support to the war; we want the U.S. government to lose. The job of citizens of the U.S. state is to focus on opposing the imperialist actions of our government, rather than on the problems of the Iraqi state or resistance. The only decent thing for U.S. workers to do is to demand immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq (and Afghanistan). Our key slogan should be, "Bring the Troops Home Now!" Building a mass movement which raises this slogan, among others, is the most important thing we can do for the Iraqis.

I further argued that we should at least oppose any politicians who take any stance short of complete and immediate withdrawal from Iraq, including those (in the U.S.) in the Democratic and Green parties. Also I declared that this did not mean giving political support to the leaders of the Iraqi armed resistance.

Support "The Resistance"?

This last point raises an important argument within the antiwar movement. There is a wing of the movement which raises the slogan, "support the resistance," meaning particularly the armed Iraqi resistance, more than the mostly unarmed "civil resistance" of unions and women's organizations. They call for "solidarity with the resistance." This position is raised by people on the Left of the movement. This is similar to those in the movement against the Vietnam war in the sixties, who called for "Victory to the National Liberation Front!" (the so-called Vietcong) and waved NLF flags in antiwar demonstrations. In this part of my essay I will discuss the presentation of one version of this position.

Of course, such slogans are not raised by the more moderate right wing of the movement, composed of liberals, social democrats, Stalinists from the tradition of the pro-USSR Communist Party, and moderate pacifists. This liberal sector aims to win over the Democratic Party and the union officialdom and therefore would not say anything that might upset these pro-imperialist forces. For similar reasons, this liberal sector does not want to raise the connection between the Iraqi war and U.S. support for Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. It even waffles on the demand for immediate withdrawal from Iraq.

But the demand that we support the resistance is being raised by much of the movement's ieft wing, the more radical section. This includes the Workers' World Party and its split-offs in the ANSWER Coalition, a major part of the movement. For example, one part of this antiwar wing, the Troops Out Now Coalition, issued a letter on May 16th, endorsing ANSWER's call for a demonstration, adding that, "the Iraqi people have a right to resist occupation by whatever means they choose."

Also, the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which is a relatively

significant left group, mainly on U.S. college campuses, raises a similar view. A recent issue of their journal, the International Socialist Review (# 40, Mar-Apr '05) has a series of four articles arguing for this position. One essay, titled "Iraqis have the Right to Resist," is by Paul D'Amato, an associate editor. He argues, "If the war is one of imperialist conquest, and the resistance opposes that conquest, then by definition the Iraqi resistance is a legitimate war of national liberation." To deny support for the resistance is, he writes, to reject national independence for Iraq. He asserts that he opposes the approach of Phyllis Bennis (similar to mine), who wrote that, "We recognize the right of the Iraqi people to resist as a point of principle, even if we do not endorse specific resistance organizations... [Therefore] we should not call for 'supporting the resistance'... " Merely recognizing the right of the Iraqis to resist is not enough for him. D'Amato says he is aware of "weaknesses and limitations of the Iraqi resistance" including "self-defeating and even reprehensible tactics used by some resistance groups... " But, he writes, "... One need not offer political support to the Iraqi resistance in order to support its main goal, driving the U.S. out of Iraq." He writes, in italics, "Americans have no right to make decisions about what kind of society the Iraqis will have — that decision should be up to the Iraqis themselves."

There are some good arguments being raised here, which I will discuss further in Part III. (For example, I agree that, "the Iraqi resistance is a legitimate war of national liberation." But I also agree with Bennis that, "We do not [have to] endorse specific resistance organizations.") Interestingly, however, I never see these arguments applied to Afghanistan. I suppose that "Support the Taliban!" is too gruesome a slogan, considering the Taliban's history. Yet the Taliban is genuinely resisting the U.S. occupiers and their puppet government. Isn't it also fighting "a legitimate war of national liberation?" No doubt most of the Taliban ranks are motivated by a desire to throw out the occupiers of their country — as well as to oppress women with the most misogynist laws in the world. True, at one time the Taliban forces were allied with the U.S. against the Russian invasion, but this was also true of some of the Muslim authoritarians in Iraq — and the Ba'athists under Saddam Husein were allies of the U.S. against Iran. So why doesn't the ISO and others call for "support the Taliban?"

In any case, there is some unclarity in D'Amato's arguments. Why isn't it enough to help the iraqis by calling for immediate withdrawal of U.S. and all other troops? Wouldn't U.S. withdrawal provide the Iraqis with all the national self-determination they need? Why isn't it enough to defend the right of Iraqis to resist the U.S. occupation, without endorsing "the" resistance? And anyway, what does it mean to "support" the resistance? Does anyone intend to ship them guns? Should U.S. radicals go to Iraq to join resistance groups (which would promptly kill them for being irreligious socialists)? True, "Americans" should not "make decisions" about how Iraqis should live — but may U.S. militants have opinions "about what kind of society the Iraqis will have?" If not, then why should we have opinions about whether they should resist occupation? That is, after all, also an opinion "about what kind of society" they should have.

Whether to "support" the armed resistance is not an immediate or practical issue for U.S. activists. It is, at most, a propagandist and educational issue. This does not mean that we should not discuss it, but it should be kept in perspective.

The Question of Class

One topic that is rarely discussed by the pro-resistance left is the class orientation of the resistance. (I find it ironic that an anarchist should have to point this out to Marxists; but these days it is often anarchists who hold to Marx's best insights.) It is not enough to say, as D'Amato does in his article, that the armed resistance has "weaknesses and limitations" and uses "self-defeating and even reprehensible tactics." It is not enough even to point out that its leadership is conservative, authoritarian, and theocratic. It is also important to point out that this leadership is pro-capitalist, and that, if it wins it will establish an authoritarian capitalist state. The jihadists have been open about being pro-capitalist and antiunion. The Ba'athists, at least in the past, claimed to be for "Arab socialism," by which they meant government ownership of most of the economy. And indeed, Sadam Hussein's regime did own the oil industry, selling the oil as a commodity on the world market, while suppressing union activity and worker rights. That is, it was state capitalist (although I have heard a Trotskyist declare that the nationalized property of Saddam's Iraq made it a "workers' state"!). The victory of the armed resistance, as presently led, would settle a new capitalist state on top of the Iraqi working people. It would be a defeat for the Iraqi workers. It would be a temporary setback for U.S. imperialism, but pretty soon the new rulers of Iraq would establish a new relationship with U.S. and world imperialism, giving themselves a better deal than before (which is what Saddam did). It would not lead to the overthrow of imperialism for Iraqis or other oppressed nations.

It is not enough to say, as D'Amato does, "One need not offer political support to the Iraqi resistance..." From a working class perspective, one needs to offer political opposition to the leadership of the Iraqi resistance. The jihadis, theocrats, semi-ex-Ba'athists, and Sunni supremacists are a pro-capitalist enemy of the Iraqi working class. They would settle a heavy yoke on the Iraqi workers and peasants. The same is true of the leaders of the opportunist wing of the Iraqi movement, those who use the structure of the occupation to set up their own state, so they think. While their followers (just as the ranks of the armed resistance) seek to expel the U.S. forces, these opportunist leaders also seek to set up a theocratic, capitalist, state, with a revised relationship to U.S. imperialism. While we should defend any Iraqis against the occupation, both groups of leaders, of would-be new rulers, should be politically opposed as enemies of the working class.

The only mention of working class interests in D'Amato's article is a remark that working class struggle would help the national resistance. "No doubt, the best means to unite Iraqis into a strong, democratic national movement would be on a class basis... A unified national liberation movement in iraq that linked independence with a program of fundamental social change would tremendously strengthen the struggle..." That is, he does not claim that the national liberation struggle would be good for the workers — apparently he is not much interested in that — but that the workers' organizing would be good for the national struggle. The workers' class struggle is presented as secondary to the national struggle. I believe that each struggle could help the other — although working class liberation is ultimately primary. But for the national movement to be re-organized "on a [working] class basis," would require that the workers oppose and replace the current pro-capitalist leadership of the national

movement. D'Amato does not say this.

There has been some effort for people in the imperialist countries to give aid to the Iraqi workers. For example, U.S. Labor Against the War sponsored a tour of the U.S.A. by spokespeople for the two Iraqi union federations and the oil workers union, including a meeting with the head of the AFL-CIO. Expenses were paid for and funds were raised. There was some controversy about one of the federations, due to its leaders' collaboration with the occupation authorities, but overall it was a practical example of internationalism.

In another part of the same issue of the ISO journal,an editorial quotes Hasan Juma'a Awad, president of the Basra Oil Workers Union. He wrote in the February 18th British Guardian, "The resistance to the occupation forces is a God-given right of Iraqis, and we, as a union, see ourselves as a necessary part of this resistance — although we will fight using our industrial power, our collective strength as a union, and as part of civil society which needs to grow in order to defeat both still-powerful Saddamist elites and the foreign occupation of our country." That is, he stands opposed to the U.S. and British occupation and also to the Ba'athist remnants, presumably including those in the resistance. Union officials in Iraq have been persecuted by the occupation (which still carries out Saddam's laws against unions in the state-owned oil industry), and also have been assaulted and murdered by resistance forces. In any case, this union leader, whatever his full politics, plans to use his union — its class power — to fight for Iraqi freedom.

To a great extent the issue of whether to support the resistance is a red herring. Advocating "support for the resistance" sounds very radical. Yet many who have this position also support Democratic Party pro-imperialist politicians. Both the ANSWER/Troops Out Now grouping and the ISO have rejected the Democrats. But in the past the leaders of the first coalition have endorsed Democrats. They invite them onto their antiwar platforms. They have recently called for lobbying Democrats. The ISO supported Nader in the last election, despite his pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist program, including gradually replacing U.S. troops in Iraq with U.N. troops. It is relatively easy to take a radical-sounding position about the Iraqi resistance (which cannot be acted on), but it is much harder to take a truly radical position of complete opposition to all pro-imperialist politicians right here at home. All the major tendencies in the U.S. peace movement, including the liberals, the ANSWER Coalition, and such groups as the ISO, fail to draw a class line in the U.S. between the workers and the pro-capitalist politicians. They fail to take a class position on Iraq (to distinguish the pro-capitalist leadership of both the resistance and the opportunists from the Iraqi working class) because they fail to take a class position in the U.S.

Part III

So far I have discussed the need to be in total opposition to the U.S. aggression in Iraq, to hope for its defeat, to oppose all politicians who waffle on the war, and to build a campaign around the slogan, "Bring the Troops Home Now!" I have also criticized the slogan of "Support the Iraqi resistance." But this needs to be discussed further. The idea of supporting the armed resistance

is, as I have said, not about immediate action in the U.S. or other imperialist countries. There is no way we could implement it here, that is, beyond building a movement for immediate and complete military withdrawal, which does not depend on this slogan. It is a propagandist and educational concept. As such, it is worth discussing in terms of its educational value.

Almost all of those who use the "support" slogan are Leninists of some sort or other, and probably most are some variant of Trotskyist (including, but not only, the ISO, which I have been quoting). Trotskyists, at least, distinguish between "political support" of the resistance and "military" or "technical support." By "support" for the resistance, they apparently mean the second sort; as comes out in occasional statements that they do not give "political support" to the leadership of the resistance. I will examine this concept of different kinds of support, in its strengths and weaknesses, from an anarchist perspective. I will discuss three situations where it has been used: an episode during the Russian revolution; the Spanish revolution; the Vietnam-U.S. war.

1. The Kornilov affair

In February 1917, during World War I, the workers, peasants, and soldiers of Russia had risen up and overthrown the old Czarist monarchy. In its place developed a network of directly elected councils (or "soviets"), rooted in face-to-face popular councils in the factories, villages, and regiments. But these were not the new, formal government, which instead was an unelected body, the Provisional Government. This was supposed to stay in place until an elected constituent assembly would write a constitution. Meanwhile this Provisional Government directed the military forces and government bureaucracy left over from the Czarist state. The government did not end the unpopular war, call elections for a constituent assembly, pass a law to give land to the peasants, nor do other things it had promised. At the same time, the soviets really had the support of the majority of the people; the Provisional Government could not do anything without the okay of the soviets. What made this double system (or "dual power," as it was called) work for a time, was that the majority in the soviets was moderate socialists who supported the Provisional Government. These reformist social democrats (Mensheviks) and reformist peasant-populists (Social Revolutionaries) were opposed to taking power into the hands of the soviets, even with them in charge. These right-wing socialists continued to support the Provisional Government, which was composed of pro-capitalist politicians — and then these reformist socialists joined the government, in alliance with the capitalist parties. The leader of the Provisional Government was Alexander Kerensky, a liberal.

Two far left tendencies opposed the Provisional Government. These were the Bolshevik (later the Communist) Party, led by Lenin, and the anarchists, divided into a range of groupings. Although growing, and pressing the Bolsheviks from the left, the anarchists remained far smaller than the Bolsheviks. Frequently in alliance, both political groupings called for the soviets to overthrow the government and replace it with an association of soviets. The Bolshevik slogan was "All Power to the Soviets!" (The Bolshevik-anarchist alliance lasted until after the overthrow of the Provisional Government in October; eventually the Bolsheviks shot the anarchists.)

By August 1917, tensions had reached a new height. The masses of people were getting fed up with the failures of the Provisional Government, but still did not fully trust the far left. On the other hand, the conservative forces of the military and the capitalists were getting fed up with the turmoil of the popular struggles, the strikes, the military committees which interfered with discipline, and the whole dual power situation. Something had to give.

The right wing forces called for a military dictatorship. It would crush the soviets, outlaw all the socialist parties — not only the Bolsheviks but also the moderates — and restore discipline to the military and to the factories with an expanded use of the death penalty. To this end Kerensky entered into a conspiracy with the top general, Lavr Kornilov. Kornilov would use the most backward of the armed forces to invade the capital city, Petrograd, and take power. Kerensky would provide political cover. Their only difference was that Kerensky expected Kornilov to put Kerensky into power while Kornilov intended to put himself on the dictator's throne. When Kerensky found this out he was shocked. He had been double crossed! He dithered and waffled in informing his government, and then the soviets, that Kornilov was advancing on the capital to stage a military coup.

What should the Bolsheviks do? (I do not know about discussions among the anarchists at this time.) Leading Bolsheviks, such as Trotsky, were in the prisons of the Provisional Government. Others had been forced underground, particularly Lenin. Could they support the government against Kornilov? The Provisional Government was supposedly for bourgeois democracy, although it was not very democratic in practice. Kornilov, however was proto-fascist. A group of sailors visited Trotsky and other Bolsheviks in their prison and asked, "Isn't it time to arrest the government?" "No, not yet," was the answer. "Use Kerensky as a gun-rest to shoot Kornilov. Afterward we will settle with Kerensky." (Trotsky, 1967, History of the Russian Revolution, vol. II, p. 227)

In fact, Bolsheviks and anarchists, along with activists from other socialist parties worked with rank-and-file workers to set up large numbers of committees for defense of the revolution. These spread throughout the Petrograd region, and in other parts of the Russian empire. They distributed arms among the workers, mobilized reliable military forces, and organized workers to sabotage the advancing Kornilov forces (so that railroad troop trains got thoroughly lost and telegraph messages never got through). Workers and soldiers from Petrograd were sent out to meet the advancing forces, to talk to them and persuade them to turn around. These methods were highly successful. The military advance dissipated like water poured on hot sand, almost nonviolently (some officers were shot). This led to a big upswing in the influence of the far left and a discrediting of the moderate socialists. It was only a matter of time until the Kerensky regime was overthrown.

Throughout the Kornilov affair, the Bolsheviks did not join the Provisional Government (and certainly the anarchists did not!). They maintained contact with other parties for purposes of practical coordination only. In later years, Trotsky cited this incident several times as a guide to action. Trotsky summarized it, "Support them technically but not politically." (p. 305) But Lenin expressed it somewhat differently. He wrote ("To the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.") at the time,

> "Even now we must not support Kerensky's government. This is

> unprincipled. We may be asked: aren't we going to fight against Kornilov? Of course we must! But this is not the same thing; there is a dividing line here... We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, just as Kerensky's troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary, we expose his weakness. There is the difference." (Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 222)

Lenin was willing to turn the workers' guns against Kornilov, in practical coordination with Kerensky's government. But he did not want to call it "support," not any kind of support.

2. The Spanish revolution

The Spanish revolution (or civil war, as it is more commonly named) raged approximately from 1936 to 1939. Usually recognized as the two main sides were the legally elected Popular Front government versus the fascist-military forces which intended to overthrow it (and eventually did, with military aid from Hitler). The Popular Front was a coalition of working class, socialist, parties, and pro-capitalist ("republican" or "Loyalist") parties. The mass of the workers was divided in half between those in the unions affiliated with the Spanish Socialist Party (which was in the Popular Front) and those in the anarchist-led unions. There was also a revolutionary socialist party called the POUM, which was a bloc of communists who had opposed the mainstream of the Communist Party (some from the right opposition and some from the left — or Trotskyist — opposition). When the military attempted its coup, the workers beat it back. Voluntary armed forces (militias) were created by the anarchists, the POUM, and the Socialists.

Given the outbreak of the civil war, what should revolutionary anarchists and other socialists do? There were some in the international movement (Bordigists and others) who thought that revolutionaries should not support either side. As one declared, "No political or material support to the bourgeois Loyalist government!" (quoted in Trotsky, The Spanish Revolution, 1973, Pathfinder, p. 422) After all, the Popular Front republic was a capitalist, imperialist, state, with a colony in Morocco, and which had jailed thousands of workers and leftists. In practice, this was an unrealistic position, since the workers were not ready to overthrow the republic in the face of fascism. The leaders of the Spanish left felt (correctly) that the republic was clearly a lesser evil to the fascists. The republic was a bourgeois democracy, which meant that, however limited its freedoms, the workers could still organize and prepare for an eventual revolution. The leading anarchists and POUMists, however, drew the conclusion from this that they should enter the Popular Front government, in alliance with the reformist socialists and out-and-out capitalist politicians. They subordinated their struggle to the capitalist state. (This is a very sketchy summary, obviously. In particular I am leaving out the treacherous role of the Communist Party.)

There was, however, a third possible position. This was for the anarchist and POUM militias to focus their forces against the fascists — until they were strong enough to overthrow the republican state. Until that day, they should give military-technical support to the republic but no political support. Revolutionary workers must not give up their political independence from the class

enemy. They should not join the Popular Front government, nor vote for its candidates, nor vote for its programs (not even its military budget). The revolutionaries would be in political opposition. They should expose the vacillations and betrayals of the Popular Front (which, in fact, led to the defeat of the republic). They would persuade the workers, peasants, and little people of the need for a revolution, replacing the bureaucratic-military state with an association of workers' and popular councils — with internal democracy so that different parties and organizations could compete for influence. In fact, this could have been demonstrated in one region of Spain (Catalonia) where the anarchist union had the support of the big majority of the local workers.

This approach was advocated by Trotsky at the time, and by his handful of Spanish followers. "If... we are not strong enough now to seize power, we must militarily fight against [the fascist] Franco... while at the same time we politically prepare for the insurrection against [the leader of the Popular Front] Negrin." (Trotsky, p. 296) This political preparation is done by exposing the weaknesses and betrayals of the liberal capitalist government.

Essentially the same approach was also raised by a revolutionary minority of anarchists, the Friends of Durruti Group. Fed up with the class compromises of the anarchist union leadership, they called for completing the revolution by overthrowing the republican capitalist state and replacing it with a national defense committee elected through the mass unions. In their 1938 Toward a Fresh Revolution, they denounced the political support of the Popular Front: "We are opposed to collaboration with bourgeois groups. We do not believe that the class approach can be abandoned. Revolutionary workers must not shoulder official posts, nor establish themselves in the ministries... That would be tantamount to strengthening our enemies and tightening the noose of capitalism." (p. 38) But they accepted practical, material, cooperation: "For as long as the war lasts, collaboration is permissible — on the battlefield, in the trenches, on the parapets, and in productive labor in the rearguard." (same) To repeat Trotsky's terms, "Support them technically but not politically."

3. The Vietnam War

These first two cases I cited did not involve national liberation struggles, although they did involve wars for other sorts of bourgeois democratic rights (meaning the rights raised in the great capitalist democratic revolutions of England, the U.S., France, Latin America, etc.). But Vietnam was a war for national independence. It had similarities and differences from what is happening in Iraq now.

Among the antiwar left there was a great deal of sympathy and even identification with the Stalinist leadership of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF, so-called Viet Cong). They were, in fact, fighting the greatest imperialist power on earth. There were many illusions, including the belief that the NLF was a multiparty front (rather than controlled by the Communist Party) and that the NLF was independent of North Vietnam. This was in the context of illusions in Castro's Cuba and Mao's China. Orthodox Trotskyists claimed that North Vietnam was a workers' state (whatever that is) and that the NLF was making a socialist revolution. It was a difficult period to be a revolutionary libertarian-democratic socialist.

Anti-Stalinist revolutionaries had no problem in opposing the U.S. war and demanding immediate withdrawal from Vietnam (unlike the Stalinists, including Maoists, who were for negotiations as a demand). But it became clear, after a certain point, that the Stalinists had the approval of the vast majority of Vietnamese. Over the decades there had been other forces, such as the Trotskyists who had much working class support in the thirties, other nationalists, unionists, and the Buddhists. But all these had been ground down by the two reactionary forces of the pro-Western side and the Stalinists. Meanwhile, what might have once been regarded as a civil war, with the pro-Western side being helped by the U.S., was now clearly a war against foreign occupation. The U.S. had flooded the country with 400,000 troops and taken over its side of the war.

Hal Draper founded a forerunner of today's ISO. A former Trotskyist, he called himself a "Third Camp socialist" and (correctly) regarded the Stalinist bureaucracy as a new ruling class. He was impressed by the 1968 Tet offensive of the NLF, in which thousands of troops were infiltrated into the major cities of South Vietnam, supply bases set up, and an offensive launched, without anyone betraying this massive operation to the puppet government. He concluded that the Stalinists had won national support. He discussed this in terms of political versus so-called military support. "We had hoped that a revolutionary third force would arise in Vietnam before this happened; we must record that this hope has been smashed by U.S. intervention... It follows that the question of military support [for the NLF] is automatically raised..." ("The ABC of National Liberation," Draper Papers-No. 1, 1989, p. 205)

The Vietnamese had the democratic right to national independence and to the government they chose, whether or not we socialists agreed with their choice. We should support that democratic right. Also, the only way that terrible war was going to end was for the NLF and North Vietnamese to win. The only way Vietnamese and U.S. people would stop being killed on a large scale was through the victory of the Stalinists, and there was no point in hoping for any other outcome (for the immediate period, that is).

However, he made clear, "The victory of the NLF is a hard fact, but no one's victory changes our political opinion of him. We remain revolutionary opponents of the NLF... and do not foster illusions... We combat glorification of the NLF..." (same, p. 206) This is what it meant to Draper to give military but not political support, namely to "remain revolutionary opponents."

Another effort to make an anti-Stalinist approach was made by Bob Potter in a pamphlet, The Rape of Vietnam, published in 1967 in Britain and again in the U.S. in 1976. Potter was part of the libertarian socialist tendency then called Solidarity in Britain, co-thinkers of Castoriadis' Socialisme ou Barbarie in France. They rejected Leninism and vanguardism and approximated class struggle anarchism. He analyzed the war as between U.S. imperialism and the national state-capitalist bureaucracy of North Vietnam and the NLF. Without using the language of political/military-technical support, he came to somewhat similar conclusions. In a section titled "Hobson's Choice," he wrote,

> "To choose sides in Vietnam is to place oneself in the tutelage of one or another bureaucratic system... The Vietnamese peasant who revolts against his feudal and foreign masters has no alternative but to support the National Liberation Front (NLF) which is controlled by the Communist Party... At this stage, revolutionaries IN VIET-

> NAM probably have little alternative but to be involved with the NLF and participate in the military struggle against the American forces. One cannot be 'neutral' while aircraft are flying over one's head, dropping bombs." (p. 15–16).
>
> Then he added, "For us, IN BRITAIN, the situation is quite different. We are not militarily involved in the struggle. There is no necessity whatsoever for us to align ourselves with any bureaucracy. We do a positive disservice to the cause of socialism if we participate in the general mystification concerning the class nature of the Russian, Chinese, or North Vietnamese regimes. Revolutionary socialists should clearly and constantly propagate their conception that socialism means the political, organizational, and ideological autonomy of the working class." (p. 16)

How does this apply to the Iraq war today?

It is not important to me whether or not we use the old Trotskyist formula. As I have shown, different people have expressed the same essential point in different words, different terms. For example, another way to phrase it is to say that between the imperialist army and the nationalist-led forces, we should be on the side of (we defend) the nationalists, but between the nationalist-led forces and the workers, we are on the side of the workers. There is support and support, and formulations and formulations. The point is, it is possible to be in solidarity with oppressed people — to defend democrats against fascism or defend oppressed nations against imperialism — while being in revolutionary opposition to their leadership and their programs.

This is the problem with the way this formula is used by the ISO and others. They use it as an excuse, a cover, not as an approach to revolutionary politics. First they propagate the slogan, "Support the resistance!" This is interpreted by almost everyone as meaning uncritical political support, being on the side of the feudalists, Sunni supremacists, theocrats, woman-haters, and union-busters. But whenever this comes up, they respond, "Oh, we are not for 'political support' of the resistance leaders." As I have quoted D'Amato.

What should be clear from the above quotes, is that everyone who used these concepts included the idea of positive opposition. Whether dealing with Kerensky vs. General Kornilov, or the Spanish republicans vs. the fascist military, or the NLF vs. the imperialist U.S., the revolutionaries I quoted said more than just that they "did not give political support" to Kerensky, the bourgeois republicans, or the Stalinist NLF. They said that they were in revolutionary opposition to these enemies of the working class! It is correct to declare that you are not neutral between the Iraqi people and the U.S. army. But it is also correct to say that you are not neutral between the leaders of the resistance and women, workers, students, and democrats.

The situation is Iraq today is different in a number of ways from that of Vietnam. In Vietnam, the whole of the nation, just about, was behind the Stalinist forces, actively or passively. This is not true in Iraq. There is no one leadership or organization. The armed resistance is divided in many parts and has not proposed a program. It is concentrated among the Sunni minority. While there are Shiite resisters, the majority is presently willing to go along with

their religious leadership, which is currently working within the framework of the occupation. The Shiite ranks (who are the majority of the country) apparently believe that this will lead to the withdrawal of the U.S. forces. Meanwhile the Kurdish minority (about the size of the Sunnis) has been pro-U.S., due to its historic oppression by the rest of Iraq. The attitude of the Shiites and Kurds may yet change, but that is in the future. Meanwhile there are major efforts to organize unions throughout Iraq, against the persecution of both the occupation and the resistance. The working class has not been suppressed by the nationalist forces. There are also women's organizations. This heterogeneous situation is quite different from the Vietnamese war.

Which leads to my conclusion that we should defend the right of the Iraqis to resist the occupation, and say that the occupation should be defeated, but that we should not endorse any particular organization nor use the slogan of "Support the resistance."

Part IV
Anarchism & National Self-Determination

Historically, the attitude of anarchists toward national liberation movements has been ambiguous. There are aspects of the socialist anarchist program which have been interpreted as supportive of national self-determination and aspects which have been interpreted as opposed to national self-determination. I believe that anarchists have been correct to oppose nationalism as a political program, which includes the advocacy of new national states. But anarchists should be supportive of the MOTIVES which lead oppressed people toward nationalism, particularly the desire to oppose imperialism and oppression. And anarchists should support the right of nations to self-determination, which is NOT the same as supporting nationalism.

National self-determination is the ability of the people of a nation to decide for themselves whether they want to be independent of another nation. This means the right to form their own national state (or nonstate community) if they want to. It would apply also to countries which are militarily attacked, invaded, and occupied, and their independence overthrown. They are denied the right to determine their own political organization. Most countries these days have national self-determination, having their own states. The term national liberation implies more than this, an end to economic and political domination by imperialism — something which is not fully possible without the overthrow of world imperialism. But if national self-determination means the right to make a choice, then nationalism as such is a particular choice, the choice of a national state. It is possible to support the right of a people to make a choice without agreeing with the immediate choice they make.

Lucien Van der Walt, of the Zabalaza Anarcho-Communist Federation of South Africa, points out that anarchists have participated in national anti-imperialist struggles in Cuba, Egypt, Ireland, Ukraine, Macedonia, Korea, Algeria, and Morocco. "The anarchist movement has paid in blood for its opposition

to imperial domination." He summarizes, "Anarchists... may fight alongside nationalists for limited reforms and victories against imperialism, but we fight against the statism and capitalism of the nationalists... This requires active participation in national liberation struggles but political independence from the nationalists. National liberation must be differentiated from nationalism, which is the class program of the bourgeoisie: we are against imperialism, but also, against nationalism." ("Towards a History of Anarchist Anti-Imperialism," Summer/Fall 2004 The Northeastern Anarchist, p. 33)

Anarchists oppose nationalism

To begin with, anarchists are internationalists. As such we have opposed imperialism in all its forms. Imperialism includes the exploitation of the workers and peasants of poorer nations by the capitalists of the richer nations. Particularly, socialist anarchists are the most consistent opponents of capitalism, which is the root of modern imperialism.

At the same time, as internationalists, anarchists oppose the ideology and political program of nationalism. Nationalism is not simply the recognition that the world is divided into nations. It is not the recognition that nations have their own cultures and languages. Nor is it the identification with a nation, as one might say, "I am a Frenchwoman" or "I am Iraqi." Nationalism is a political program. It says that the working class and poor people of a country have more in common with their capitalist rulers than they do with the workers and poor of other countries. Patriotic nationalism denies that workers of one country have common interests with the workers and oppressed of all countries against the rulers of the world. Similarly it denies, or at least downplays, the existence of other, nonclass, forms of oppression, such as the oppression of women, within the nation.

Nations generally have been formed by the suppression of diverse regions, "races," and minority nationalities. Racial, national, and other forms of oppression exist in virtually every country. The Kurds have long been oppressed by the Iraqi state, for example. Throughout the world, the First Nations (so-called primitive peoples) have been trampled on by established nations, including formerly oppressed "Third World" nations (the First Nations have sometimes been called the "Fourth World"). Nationalism has justified this oppression due to its idealization of the unified nation.

Nationalism supports the national state. In theory, there could be an anti-authoritarian nationalism, one which advocates a nation organized into a federation of self-governing industries and communes. In practice, nationalism so far has served to advocate a new national state or to support existing national states. The Iraqi resistance is presently fighting to create a new, capitalist, Iraqi state. So are the opportunist Iraqis who are working within the confines of the occupation. Their only difference is over how to get this new state. Nations have generally been formed around states. These states exist to serve the interests of the national capitalists against other national capitalists and against their own working people.

As a program, nationalism has not been very effective. While most countries have won their own national states, most of them remain poor and oppressed. Imperialist colonialism, which denied self-determination to most countries, has

been replaced by imperialist neocolonialism. So-called Third World countries mostly have their own states, but they are poverty-stricken and subordinated to the world economy, which is dominated by corporations of the U.S. and other imperialist powers. Political independence has been achieved, but economic independence has not. Real national liberation has not arrived — and cannot be achieved without international socialist-anarchist revolution.

Anarchists oppose the program of establishing new states; we aim to smash existing states. Anarchists feel that the workers of the world have a common interest in overthrowing international capitalism, which is a single world system. Anarchists oppose all forms of oppression and encourage oppressed groupings within nations to assert themselves. As decentralists and pluralists, anarchists oppose the suppression of "minority" cultures, races, and peoples by unified national cultures.

As all national liberation struggles have been nationalist in program, this anti-nationalism would seem to pit anarchism against national self-determination. (Actually, it could be argued that Muslim authoritarianism or jihadism is not nationalist in the usual sense, but I will not go into that here.) However, there is another side to anarchism, which points to possible support for national liberation (beyond anarchism's opposition to imperialism).

Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey, of the Nigerian Awareness League, write in African Anarchism (1997), "Anarchists demand the liberation of all existing colonies and support struggles for national independence in Africa and around the world as long as they express the will of the people in the nations concerned. However, anarchists also insist that the usefulness of 'self-determination' will be very limited as long [as] the state system and capitalism — including Marxist state capitalism — are retained... A viable solution to the myriad of problems posed by the national question in Africa, such as internecine civil conflicts, is realizable only outside the context of the state system." (pp. 106 — 107)

Anarchists have supported self-determination

Anarchists are decentralists, or rather, believers in a decentralized federalism. We advocate a socialist society of collective communities, cooperative associations, and directly-democratic workplaces, self-managed by face-to-face, assemblies. We believe that such assemblies should be associated together in voluntary federations, from the region, to the nation, to the continent, to the world. This includes the right of the lower levels of the federation to secede.

Bakunin declared, "Each individual, each association, commune, or province, each region and nation, has the absolute right to determine its own fate, to associate with others or not, to ally itself with whomever it will, or break any alliance... The right to unite freely and [to] separate with the same freedom is the most important of all political rights, without which confederation will always be disguised centralization." (quoted in Guerin, Anarchism, 1970, p. 67). This implies national self-determination.

In his book on anarchism, Daniel Guerin commented on this statement, "True internationalism rests on self-determination, which implies the right of secession... Lenin and the early congresses of the Third International adopted this concept from Bakunin, and the Bolsheviks made it the foundation of their policy on nationalities and of their anticolonialist strategy — until they eventu-

ally belied it to turn to authoritarian centralization and disguised imperialism." (same) In my opinion it is unlikely that Lenin took his concept of national self-determination from the anarchists (he did not take anarchist theory seriously). But it is true that Lenin also argued for a policy of national self-determination. Some of his arguments were such that an anarchist might use. He argued that working class socialists should support all struggles for democratic rights, such as national self-determination, because these would help to break up capitalism. He argued that workers of oppressed nations would not trust the working class of their imperialist oppressors, unless the latter were willing to give up their national privileges and support the oppressed nation in its right to self-determination.

However, Lenin's motives were different from the anarchists. Lenin was a centralist, as he frequently pointed out. He advocated national self-determination as a way-station on the road to complete merger of separate nations into centralized big states, eventually into a centralized world system. He declared, "We do not advocate preserving small nations at all costs; other conditions being equal, we are decidedly for centralization and are opposed to the petty-bourgeois ideal of federal relationships." ("On the National Pride of the Great Russians," Selected Works, vol. 1, 1970, p. 660) In the same way, he advocated workers' control of industry as a step toward state management; he called for land to the peasants as a step toward state farms; he fought for soviet democracy as a step toward one-party rule. Anarchists, on the other hand, really value small national cultures, varied societies, and different ways of living. We hope for a free federation of peoples, not a monstrously centralized world state.

Anarchists oppose all forms of oppression

To most modern anarchists, anarchism is not just against capitalism, but against all forms of domination and oppression. Capitalism (the capital/ labor relationship) does not stand alone. It is intertwined with other forms of oppression: gender, racial, sexual freedom, sexual orientation, age, physical disabilities, ecological, and so on. These systems (or subsystems) of domination interact, overlap, and mutually support each other. Some may be more central to the overall authoritarian society than others (I would argue that capitalism is at the core of authoritarian society) but all contribute to its maintenance. This view is counterposed to those who regard one form of oppression as all that counts. A crude version of Marxism and a mechanical syndicalism have argued that capitalist exploitation of the workers is all that is important, and that all other forms of oppression are just smoke and mirrors designed to distract and divide the workers. Similar views are held by those who argue that patriarchy or race or industrialism are the real issue and everything else is a distraction. Instead most anarchists today, I think, believe that all oppression must be opposed.

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