

Who Killed off the Anti-War Movement?

Torab Saleth, June 21 2007

Have you ever wondered what happened to the mass anti-war movement which in London alone brought out almost two million people before the invasion of Iraq in February 2003? How come no such huge response is at hand when we are faced with a similar plan for Iran?

Who killed it off? And how? Well it definitely wasn't Tony Blair and New Labour. They showed how far they were prepared to go in fabricating stories and how easily they lied through their teeth to defend their US masters. Not to mention the results of that campaign which left our snake charmer, Tony ("the best Tory leader we have never had") Blair, with the catchphrase of every incompetent fool history has produced: "I only did what I thought was best."

Well, if you don't have time and want a short answer, just follow the practice of a large section of the British left led by the Socialist Workers Party. Don't think, just follow the SWP - they can show you all you need to know about making the movement unattractive to almost all decent human beings: by collaborating with supporters of the semi-fascistic islamic fundamentalist regime in Iran.

Ask British workers to march alongside the same people who are imprisoning, torturing and killing their fellow workers in Iran and carry posters saying, "We are all Hezbollah now!" Or ask students, teachers, writers, women activists, academics and peace campaigners to come out and oppose the imperialist war while holding hands with the supporters of those who are killing their brothers and sisters in Iran and who collaborate with the same imperialist armies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Better still, make tens of thousands of Iranian exiles feel threatened in Britain itself by bringing out the same Hezbollah thugs that kill and torture their comrades back home and shower them with SWP posters and placards.

For those of you who need a bit of theory, then you will also have to learn apologetics for the Tehran regime. Again, the method is simple, known to opportunists since the time of the Phoenicians: the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Of course, the likes of the SWP with its string of Marxist 'scholars' have a more modern explanation. Well, a string of explanations. We will just examine one.

Before going over the arguments of the apologists, let us just recall what type of regime we are dealing with. This is the same capitalist regime which killed off one of the most important revolutions of the 20th century. The same regime which only a few months after the overthrow of the shah banned the free press in Iran, suppressed all forms of freedom of assembly, made all non-governmental political parties illegal, arrested worker activists, forced the veil on women and started a military campaign against the national minorities.

This is the same regime which by the summer of 1981, having consolidated its power, embarked upon one of the most concerted campaigns of attacks on socialists seen since the time of Hitler. The same regime which closed down all institutions of higher education and forced students and lecturers alike to undergo an islamic ideological test before being allowed back. The same regime which in the summer of 1987 in order to solve the problem of overcrowding in its jails massacred over 12,000 political prisoners.

It is the same regime which only three years ago opened fire on workers protesting against non-payment of wages. The same regime which a year ago in order to break a planned busworkers' strike in Tehran raided the homes of hundreds of activists the night before the strike, took their children and partners hostage and forced drivers at gunpoint into their buses. The same regime which right now under the noses of our SWP comrades is jailing striking teachers and beating and kidnapping worker activists. Has this jogged your memory, comrades of the SWP, or need we go on?

So how does anyone, let alone SWP scholars, manage to cover up these facts? The first and most commonly used excuse follows the usual superficial logic of abandoning class politics and opting for third worldist bourgeois nationalist anti-imperialism. It is claimed, no matter what the character of the Iranian regime, it is standing up against the US and we have to defend it against this bigger danger. But it is possible to be even more reactionary than the main reactionary force - 160 years ago Marx wrote you can be a socialist but still more reactionary than capitalism. How come our modern-day scholars cannot understand that you can be anti-imperialist but even more reactionary than imperialism itself? If Genghis Khan was alive today you can bet your copy of the *Communist manifesto* that he would be more anti-imperialist than our president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The shi'ite hierarchy and the bazari merchants who took over the reins of power in 1979 were 'anti-imperialist' because the shah's bourgeois reforms of the 60s had attacked the landholdings of the biggest landlord in Iran - ie, the shi'ite apparatus - had eroded the local power of the mullahs by introducing local government and giving votes to women and had attacked the stranglehold of bazari merchants on the Iranian economy by introducing heavy import duties and channelling investments to local industrial production, albeit a simple assemblage of foreign products.

In an earlier age we used to call these groups the 'traditional Iranian comprador bourgeoisie', but now they are the anti-imperialist heroes of the SWP. The historical bankruptcy of bourgeois nationalism and the pro-Soviet left in the region allowed this reactionary force to take the lead in the anti-shah movement, crush the revolution of 79 and re-establish a bourgeois state with a political regime 10 times more oppressive than under the shah. Wages have been driven back to levels not seen since the 50s. Iran now has over 10 million unemployed, four million heroin addicts and is the largest exporter of under-age sex workers in the entire Middle East.

It has naturally played the SWP's anti-imperialist card since the first day after overthrow of the shah. Right now it is using the same rhetoric to cover a new wave of repression against workers, women, students and national minorities. Indeed one of the main reasons it has embarked on this confrontation with the USA is to use this threat to suppress all opposition. So by this perverse SWP logic we have to defend a reactionary regime as anti-imperialist which is killing off the *real* anti-imperialist movement in the Middle East.

But, comrades of the SWP, answer us one question. Keep your anti-imperialist spectacles on and view the world in whatever simple terms that help you and your allies in Respect to justify your opportunist bloc, but please tell us why you cannot defend those who are fighting oppression and injustice in Iran? Why should mobilising against the imperialist threat, whilst at the same time defending workers, women and students in Iran, weaken the anti-imperialist struggle? Why instead do you have to become apologists for such a major counterrevolutionary force?