

Is the Western Left Afraid of Revolution?

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Heretical no doubt but the history of the Left in the allegedly developed world is not exactly littered with success stories, worse still is our relationship with the developing world as the confusion surrounding who to support (or not to) in Iran most clearly reveals. And this is not a new phenomenon as the ideological battles, for example over Cuba, reveal, or more recently Venezuela. It seems that in spite of our failure to bring about an end to capitalism in no way impedes our desire to tell everyone else what should be done to bring about social change. The traditional tag (on the left) is chauvinism, that is to say, bigotry and prejudice let alone arrogance, the old 'we know best' attitude but from whence does it come?

Most evidently, it's far easier to pontificate about what 'they' should or should not be doing in some far off place rather than dealing with our own issues and most importantly, our own ruling class.

'One principle that we stress is that the Iranian election was Iranian business, not the business of the Western left, especially the left in a country like the United States, which has been intervening continuously and destructively in Iran for years and which is still, in alliance with Israel, threatening Iran militarily.' — Iran: Reply to the Campaign for Peace and Democracy By Edward S. Herman and David Peterson The same piece goes on to say,

'Another principle that we believe important is that the left should be especially active where it can have a clearly positive influence. This is not the case for Iran, where U.S. relations with Iran are poor and the left's aggressive support of the anti-Ahmadinejad forces could have perverse effects like intensifying internal repression and/or foreign hostility towards the Iranian state. Positive effects of left-campaigning would be much more likely in the case of Honduras, which is the site of U.S. military bases and where the military and government depend on U.S. support. Here, left focus, anger, and pressure on Washington could have a beneficial impact. We point out that the New York Times features Iran with intensity and indignation, but does not do this for the coup and new military dictatorship in Honduras.'

Many years ago, in a far-off galaxy, well Zambia to be exact, I was privileged to be working with the African National Congress whilst it was still a liberation movement in exile, installing computers and training comrades in how to use them. One of the groups (reluctantly) sponsoring me was based in the US. Their background was solidarity work in a Central American country, a country that had overthrown the US-backed dictatorship and importantly, they were working directly with the government. Not so in Zambia, where the ANC was a guest of the Zambian government and under constant threat from the then Apartheid South Africa (bombings were frequent), it was, to put it mildly, a delicate situation. 'Interfering' in the internal workings of the ANC wasn't on my, or our agenda and

especially from North Americans who were generally viewed with some suspicion by the comrades. Paranoia? Maybe, but that was the reality, getting caught up in the internal politics was something to be avoided at all costs, not only because it wasn't our business but also because for the most part, we had no idea what was going on. Thus whatever reservations I had about the way the ANC functioned had to be set aside (though this didn't stop me getting involved in private discussions with those closest to me, but that's where it ended).

Not so for my North American companions, who felt it necessary to get involved in the internal political wranglings of the ANC, not a wise move, I can assure you from bitter personal experience. It's one thing to give freely of your skills and experience without strings and even here, different ways of working, even seeing things differently can make life frustrating for us, but that's the breaks.

No doubt there is a great deal of idealism and romanticism involved, after all, we were on the 'front line', and actually doing something concrete in solidarity with liberation movements is of course important but on whose terms?

I have to return to a theme that I think lies at the heart of the problem, namely racism pure and simple. For five centuries we have been lording it over the planet, our wealth and knowledge, access to all manner of resources eg, our centres of 'learning', the sophisticated networks and so forth have created the illusion of superiority. We have collectively benefited from this abundance of wealth, albeit for most, merely the crumbs off the table, but that does not alter the fact that we are citizens of Empire and that includes the UK's hankering for days of yore, that relies on the complicity or at least the acquiescence of its citizens.

"You are in an intractable contradiction. The western left has been brought to the reality that its very sense of self, its privileges, small but depended on, illusion of superiority, also depended on for sense of self...allow equality of the exploited in all means of life and the destruction of the exploiters follows, the left included. Therefore, they rationalize genocide with suicide because inevitably the reproduction and enlargement of capital is their accepted life force. It's just in their make-up." — Patricia Murphy-Robinson

We need only look at the general attitude of Britons to 'our boys over there'. Yes, they are for the most part working class but they kill and torture on behalf their Masters, is it enough to say that they too, are victims or is it also that we have absorbed the ideology of the 'master race' even though it works against our direct interests, but then isn't that the point? The history of the Left in the West is littered with examples of chauvinist/racist thinking, for example the French Communist Party's position over the Algerian independence struggle comes to mind, or closer to home, the racism that was/is endemic in the British trade union movement (let alone the closely related sexism).

So whilst we debate endlessly the ins and outs of who said what to whom and when and what they really meant, or argue over the nature of 'real' socialism, elsewhere in the real world, a *luta continua*. For the fact is, it's the colonized and neo-colonized of the world who have borne the brunt of the struggle just as they continue to do so. In effect, fighting a battle that is by rights really ours to fight.

So while we argue over who to support in Iran, our governments continue their subversion,

sabotage and threats against Iran and, regardless of their politics, any country that threatens Western interests. Let's face it, it's much easier to get all worked up about events in a far-off land, and one where our influence and importance is less than zero, than it is to confront our own demons. Moreover, I am sure that the memory of British involvement in the overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953 is still fresh in the minds of many Iranians, thus it is not surprising that we are viewed with some suspicion whether we consider ourselves for or against the recent events in Iran.

Is it enough to blame propaganda? At what point do we accept responsibility for our own (in)actions? A case in point is Britain's 'mission creep' in Afghanistan. Britain's tin-pot military campaign is leading to increasing numbers of British casualties (nearly 200, now surpassing those sustained in Iraq), that is only now leading to questioning 'our' role in Afghanistan, not because we shouldn't be there in the first place but because we are ill-equipped to suppress Afghan resistance to the occupation and because once again it's 'our boys' getting killed (no mention of the slaughter of Afghans of course, but then they're not 'our boys and girls').

For sure, the British state is on a propaganda offensive, justifying our continued occupation by asserting that unless the Taliban are defeated (fat chance), 'al-Qu'eda' will bring the war home to the Fatherland. Yes, I know it's a pathetic argument, but it designed to tap into the worst nationalist sentiments when allied to British troops being killed. So what is the 'left's' response to this? The Stop the War coalition puts it this way,

'200 DEAD PROTESTS. Stop the War's local groups are preparing protests to take place the weekend after the 200th British soldier is killed in Afghanistan. At the current rate of fatalities, with 191 having died so far, it is likely this figure will be reached in the near future. It will be yet another testament to tragically wasted lives of soldiers — some as young as eighteen — sent to kill and be killed in a futile war.' — Stop the War Newsletter, 31 July, 2009

The problem of course is that it's not a 'futile war', unwinnable maybe but definitely not futile, it flows from the UK's imperial desires, however unrealistic they may be. And why isn't Stop the War organizing on the basis of the unknown (because they're not counted) numbers, definitely in their thousands, of Afghan people slaughtered in this 'pointless' war? If 'our boys' weren't dying in increasing numbers, what then would be the basis of Stop the War's opposition aside from the 'futility' of it? And yes, for sure, opposition to the war is increasing in the UK but not because of a principled opposition to it but because 'our boys' are dying in increasing numbers in what is (and always has been) an unwinnable war, especially when conducted by our inept military that clearly hopes that casualties can be kept low enough not to really piss people off. And of course it's our young who are getting sacrificed on the altar of imperial lust. The 'Thin Red Line' is looking decidedly threadbare. The Stop the War Coalition is the largest and most visible expression of the anti-war movement in the UK, ever since it organized the massive 2003 demonstration to the (inevitable) invasion of Iraq, yet throughout its campaign, the issue of opposition to the invasion of Iraq and now Afghanistan (and why did it take eight years?), does not link capitalism to the issues, but surely this is the question that has to be put: Why are we there and what are we allegedly fighting for if not to stop 'al-Qu'eda (well this is the latest wheeze to come of our war-mongering Labour government)? And if this is true, then we are conducting a war against a perceived and multi-national 'enemy' but doing it in someone else's back yard! So what happened to our concern for human rights in Afghanistan, wasn't that the reason we pounded, the already pounded and blighted land of Afghanistan?

Yet aside from Stop the War, the only other groups involved in the planned demonstration are the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the British Muslim Initiative, neither of which are known for their opposition to capitalism. Now I have no problem with any organization joining in campaigns to halt the UK's imperial ambitions but on whose terms?

Frankly, it strikes me that Stop the War have adopted an opportunist position, 'let's not mention capitalism or wars over resources and strategic locations, it might frighten people off'. Yet unless we start out the way we mean to continue, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of our past, and this means taking a principled stand on fundamental issues, like the fact that these crazy capitalists are taking us all to hell and it's up to us to tell like it is.

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