

Iraq and the Third Camp

THE THIRD CAMP ALTERNATIVE is ultimately expressed by the potential of the Iraqi working class assuming the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement. We do not and cannot claim that this third camp is presently a conscious alternative on the part of those who will make it possible. But we must position ourselves toward that process of struggle which can develop a leadership able to mobilize the masses and attract international support in its resistance to the American occupation without sacrificing the Iraqi nation to the resurgent forces of jihadist fascism.

That is, we support an anti-imperialist movement that does not jeopardize the demands and just aspirations of the working class, of women and gays, of secularists, of national minorities and democrats to the cause of national salvation. We recognize that a nation "redeemed" by authoritarian movements, whether clerical or Baathist, would leave Iraq an empty shell; independent after a sense, but an Iraq whose independence in the absence of popular democratic participation would be a mockery of "self-determination" by any socialist standard. It is to the latent national leadership of these groupings of the oppressed that we counterpose both to the defeatist consciousness of those socialists-in-retreat who, reluctantly or zealously, look to imperialism to clear a path to democracy and to those slow learners and outright nitwits on the left for whom pleading the cause of "the armed resistance," however reactionary its social program and aspirations, is an adequate and sufficient political orientation.

Revolutionary forces, small and beleaguered as they may be, exist in the Islamic and Arab world and their voices are worth heeding. They exist in the Labor Party of Pakistan, who condemn the fake anti-imperialism of Islamist forces across the globe as the "anti-imperialism of fools." It exists in the

Worker-communist Party of Iraq, who inveigh against the "reactionary left" abroad, "more concerned with the number of terrorist operations committed by the local fascists (a motley collection of political Islamists, ex-Baathists and regional chauvinists they like to call the 'resistance') than they are to the labor movement struggles, sit-ins and demonstrations which they rarely report. It is exemplified by the fearless Iraqi women who marched in support of International Women's Day under the slogan "no to the USA and its war, occupation and militarism . . . no to the violations of gangs of political Islam," and who bravely renounce the compulsory hijab and sexual segregation. It is exemplified by the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq who defiantly proclaim the imperative separation of religion from the state and declare their endorsement for laws that "oppose all discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, sect, and race" – an explicit rejection of any forthcoming constitution that seeks consistency with Sharia law.

These are voices that find the "liberty" brought to Iraq by the occupation forces to be disastrous in no small part because American imperialism all too predictably fueled the ranks of reaction throughout the Arab world and circumvented and short-circuited the internal revolutionary process in Iraq itself. And it similarly views the elections with the well-founded suspicion that they are a means less to transfer sovereignty than to increase the legitimacy of the occupation.

And this is the point that eludes those for whom the elections retroactively justify their critical support for the intervention. For they have simply wrapped their critical faculties and socialist program in political mothballs. One cannot help but admire those who by the millions braved deadly intimidation to vote for an end to violence and occupation. And although this election was in no small part forced on the American occupation by Ayatollah Sistani, one might profitably speculate that it was acceded to as an expedient to protect

and legitimate U.S.-approved political forces against the outrage and discontent of the Iraqi masses and to strengthen their hands against other sections of jihadist Islam and the remnants of the Baath party who are also vying for power.

The U.S. domination of Iraq remains unchanged by this election, except insofar as it ushered in an Islamic- ethnic and sectarian parliament. The transitional administration laws drawn up under Paul Bremer remain in place with legal safeguards that make them virtually impossible to contravene. Key personnel, judges, and prosecutors were vetted and appointed by the occupation authorities. Supplementing the direct influence of the State Department and the Pentagon are tens of thousands of private reconstruction contractors, advisors, and employees who together wield a virtual economic and political stranglehold over the new government, its legal system, and its political latitude. The coming parliament will therefore be little more than a continuation of the last two years of administration, with only the thinnest veneer of electoral legitimacy.

The question then remains: How to struggle against American imperialism without strengthening the camp of fascist reaction? What concrete acts and political demands can we make to fortify the forces of democracy?

It is widely understood that the aims of the occupation are to eliminate the destabilizing influences that can now, or may in the future, hamper American access and control of Gulf oil supplies. The Bush administration sees this war as a continuation of the "global war on terror," and it has conducted itself in a manner commensurate with that view. The al-Qaeda-Baathist connection was of course concocted in the bowels of the CIA and is universally discredited as a transparent façade. But this is not at issue here. The reckless use of firepower and the wanton brutality of American might have been both a predictable breeding ground for jihadists as well as a focal point leeching and

reconcentrating these hitherto disparate forces into Iraq from neighboring states and abroad.

The United States, drawing a lesson from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, has, in effect, treated the peoples of Iraq as if they were so much cheese in a geopolitical mousetrap. Unlike the Soviets, however, the United States confidently believes it now faces an immanently vulnerable Islamacist insurgency bereft of any great power quartermaster. If Iraq is now and in fact the "central front" in the fight against global terror, it is so entirely because the United States has cynically stage-managed the circumstances under which it could be. This process promises to strengthen and internationalize the resistance, polarize the Arab world on that basis and stimulate parallel reflexive tendencies to authoritarianism within the nascent Iraqi government. As this cycle matures, whatever space that presently exists for the elements of democracy can be expected to be rapidly circumscribed and eroded.

IT IS FOR THESE REASONS that the demand for the immediate removal of American troops is the single demand most adequate to the task of breaking this downward spiral and the central act of solidarity that the antiwar movement can offer the forces of Iraqi democracy. As this is being written the "armed resistance" has gathered new momentum. The removal of all foreign armies would go far in satisfying the legitimate nationalist demands of the Association of Muslim Scholars and Muqtada al-Sadr's forces and fracture the de facto alliance between the national armed resistance, for which they offer political mediation, and al-Qaeda and the communalist militias which seek ethnic separatism. It would allow the Iraqi Arabs, an ethnic amalgam artificially cobbled together by British imperialism, to cohere as a nation around the new parliament. And, most important, for Iraqi democracy, it would release and redirect the latent class antagonisms and social conflicts now

suppressed and overwhelmed by the immediate struggle with foreign domination.

For it is a militant, democratic Iraqi working class that holds the future key to the larger regional anti-imperialist struggles. In the specific circumstances of the Middle East, it is impossible to impose a national solution to the social problems that beset Iraq and the Arab countries. Al-Qaeda has already made that connection and offers its own thoroughly reactionary "permanent revolution in reverse." It, and the breeding grounds that nurture it, can never be eliminated by more American intervention, or by emerging Arab democracies that are politically and economically captured by the imperatives of American imperialism and its own native capitalist classes. These social problems, and with it the defeat of al-Qaeda, can only be resolved through revolutionary struggle for the internationalization of the region's vast oil resources under the democratic control of the Middle Eastern working classes.

Footnotes