

Letter to the Editor

Letter from: Tom Unterrainer

To the Editor:

BARRY FINGER IS CORRECT to insist that the only possible stance for socialists to take towards Iraq is to call for an end to occupation and for solidarity with the Iraqi trade union and women's movements. This perspective is sadly lacking in sections of the international antiwar movement who do not recognize their significance and in some elements on the left who support the occupation. His article reminds us that opposition to the occupation is not simply a question of reflex anti-imperialism – a reflex that can lead to support for the “resistance” – but arises from a consideration of the actually existing situation. Such considerations make the question of active solidarity with progressive forces in Iraq an urgent one.

The dual horrors of a brutal occupation and reactionary resistance movements put immense pressure on the autonomous working-class voices of opposition in Iraq. The only brake on this is the “Provisional Authority” in Iraq whom the occupying powers imagine (or at least attempt to convince us) are the seed of a future democracy. In order to sustain a semblance of democratic decorum the occupiers and the PA are forced to leave space for the growth of a trade union movement. In his article, Finger explains the inherent suspicion developed by the imposition of “democracy” from outside-and-above. If, as seems possible, the moves towards imposing “democracy” and the development of a client regime crumble in the face of opposition, the United States and her allies will be forced to fully colonize Iraq or withdraw completely. Either of these two moves will spell very hard times for the only forces in Iraq capable of bringing about real democracy – from inside-and-below.

Already, trade unionists and progressives have been murdered by fundamentalists and fragments of the Ba'ath regime or in some 'accident' by occupying troops. If we do not build solidarity, highlight the atrocities taking place now, and give material assistance then things can and will get worse. Iraq is not virgin territory in terms of the existence and combativeness of trade union and socialist organisations. From strikes over pay and conditions in the oil fields to mass demonstrations against repression on university campuses, Iraqis are standing up for workers' rights and democracy across the country.

The antiwar movement needs to make a turn from pure objection to the continued occupation – a strategy that either explicitly or implicitly advocates “victory for the [reactionary] resistance” – toward solidarity with democratic forces in Iraq. The question needs to be raised in trade union and labor organisations, in antiwar groups and in the wider press. In so doing, socialists will fulfil their obligations as internationalists and democrats and re-emphasise the centrality of the working class to our perspective. The fact that we have to carry this message into such movements is an indication of how far some have drifted from the ideas of socialism towards a reactionary anti- imperialism.

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