'The Anti-Imperialism of Fools': A Cautionary Story on the Revolutionary Socialist Vanguard of England's Post-9/11 Anti-War Movement

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Preface

The day after 9/11 I attended a local Socialist Alliance committee meeting in Sheffield, England, as a representative of the revolutionary socialist organisation, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) comrades present discussed the 9/11 attack as regrettable in terms of the loss of life but as nonetheless understandable. They acknowledged the attack as tactically misguided, yet refused (when pressed to do so) to condemn it. Later, in November 2001, at a public meeting of the Sheffield Socialist Alliance, I shared a platform with a then national committee member of the SWP to debate the US and UK war in Afghanistan. Besides from agreeing on opposition to the imperialist war onslaught, I was alone on the platform in raising opposition to the Islamist Taliban rule and in arguing for labour movement solidarity with forces such as the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), which resist both imperialism and Islamism and demand a progressive, democratic secular alternative. The SWP comrades present, both on the platform and from the floor, alleged a political error on my part and those who argued along with me. Their rationale was that, to fully

oppose the War on Terror, we had a duty to oppose the main enemy and greater evil - US and UK imperialism - and this alone. Anything else, they argued, would alienate the masses of disillusioned, angry British Muslim youth that socialists needed to win over. The SWP's dual camp of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' (a socialistic inversion of imperialist war discourse of 'the status quo versus regression') came to dominate England's anti-war movement. They publicly launched their initiative the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) ten days after 9/11, with the aim of mobilising a broad political grouping against the War on Terror. Since then the SWP vanguard of the StWC has, at critical moments, steered the political course that England's anti-war protests have taken.

Introduction: Neither inverted dual camps nor point zeros

During war time major imperialist powers typically impose a geopolitical choice between the status quo and regression, or the civilised and the barbaric. The consequence of this bourgeois dual camp is that its fetishism, including in its leftist inversion, diverts from the indispensable task of organising a third independent force, or camp, of politics by and for the collective interests of workers worldwide. The War on Terror is pitched by its leading imperialist advocates as a battle of us versus them, or good versus evil, while, in an inverted dual camp, 9/11 and later Islamist acts of terrorism are conceptualised by sections of the Left as inevitable products of a greater imperialist terrorism and a reflection of wider struggles between David and Goliath. This in turn lends itself to the conclusion that such products and struggles form part of an anti-imperialist resistance necessitating (albeit qualified) alliance against the prime enemy. It is this conclusion - in relation to the case of a revolutionary socialist vanguard of an anti-war movement in the West - that this paper identifies as problematic. I do so not by orientating to post-Marxist left analysis but by returning to the spirit of Marxism. In brief, this paper draws upon the tradition of third camp revolutionary socialists during war time, in order to critique the blind-alley inverted dual campism dominating leftist anti-war resistance during the War on Terror. This tradition is to develop the independent political agency of workers internationally, as a class capable of self-government in their struggles against capitalism and its reactionary products, and to assess, by and for this class's advancement, the upshot of the actual politics flowing from these struggles and products. In the simplest terms, the rudimentary foundation of the third camp is "nothing but the camp of workers and oppressed peoples everywhere who are sick to death of insecurity, exploitation, subjection and increasingly abominable wars, who aspire to freedom, peace and equality" independent of their ruling class and their ruling class's reactionary enemies (Shachtman, 2006c [1950], xi).

The absence of third camp politics is apparent in prominent leftist academic and public intellectual commentary on 9/11 and the War on Terror. In the aftermath

of 9/11 Watts (2005, 645), for instance, observes a "confusion mixed with revulsion" within the ranks of the Left: "the reluctance to admit 'they had it coming', the whispered moral equivalence of casualties (what of Rwanda or the Palestinian intifada?) and a sort of deep schizophrenia" - "[w]as this not a strike in the name of a modern anti-imperialism or was it grounds for a 'just war' […] Was this not of a piece with the anti-globalisation movement", yet who could endorse Islamism? Chomsky (2001, 12), while denouncing 9/11, defines its uniqueness in the fact that, unlike any other point in US foreign imperialist venture or European colonial history, the victims struck back at the very heart of the imperialist power: directing "the guns [...] the other way". More to the point, 9/11 was a cumulative result of US foreign policy and proved that industrial powers no longer had the monopoly on violence (Chomsky, 2003, 2002). In an article for Le Monde just under two months after 9/11, Baudrillard remarks that the event represented "the purest type of defiance" and "could be forgiven", since:

> In dealing all the cards to itself, the system forced the Other to change the rules of the game. And the new rules are ferocious, because the game is ferocious. […] All those singularities (species, individuals, cultures), which have paid with their deaths for the establishment of a global system of commerce ruled by a single power, avenge themselves by transferring the situation to terrorism (Baudrillard, 2001, in Afary and Anderson, 2005, 170).

During the US invasion of Najaf in 2004, Klein (2004) tactically defends the Shiite Islamist Muqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army, despite recognising the politics of the Mahdi Army that (if ever to come to power) would attempt an Iranian-type theocracy. Her reasoning is that, for the moment the Mahdi Army represents something in common with the Iraqi population - opposition to the imperialist occupation of Iraq. In a plenary of an anti-war teach-in at Berkeley, Butler (2006) comments:

> Understanding Hamas, Hezbollah, as social movements that are progressive, that are on the Left, that are part of a global Left, is extremely important, that does not stop us from being critical of certain dimensions of both movements […] it doesn't stop those of us who are interested in non-violent politics from raising the question of […] whether there are other options besides violence, so again, a critical, important engagement [...] should be entered into the conversation on the Left.

The signatories to an anti-war statement released during the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon offer "solidarity and support to the victims of th[e] brutality [in Lebanon and Palestine] and to those who mount a resistance against it" (see: Chomsky,

2006), by implication then, political support to Hezbollah and Hamas. These signatories include SWP members (Alex Callinicos, Lindsey German, Chris Bambury and John Rees), and leftist academics and public intellectuals (Gilbert Achcar, Tariq Ali, Frances Burgat, Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky, IIan Pappe, Harold Pinter, Tanya Reinhart, Steven Rose, Hilary Rose, Arundhati Roy and Howard Zinn, for example). While Achcar (2006a) cautions against the SWP's alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain in England's anti-war movement (an organisation with political links to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood), he nonetheless frames a struggle "between the Islamic fundamentalist David and the US imperialist Goliath" (Achcar, 2006b, 72). Specifically, the "demon" of US imperialism, which has produced and fed the "monster" of Islamic fundamentalism for its own interests, now finds itself vulnerable, because "the demon […] ultimately turned against the demiurge" and so (as on 9/11) the monster is hitting back (Achcar, 2006b, 43). Achcar (2006b) concludes that in the battle between two barbarisms the prime culpability lies with the greater, heavyweight barbarism. Crucially, he fails to exhibit a politically independent, progressive democratic alternative to both imperialism and its reactionary enemies. Indeed, this is a symptomatic failure of all of the aforementioned commentary.

Closer to the disciplinary home, prominent Marxist and post-Marxist public intellectual geographers fall short of mapping out an anti-imperialist resistance in the spirit of the third camp. As Castree (2008, 168) remarks of Smith's (2005a) The endgame of globalization: "[i]f one thing is missing it's a discussion of progressive forms of opposition within and without the American state apparatus". Harvey's (2005) The New Imperialism offers brief mention of the daunting challenges faced by an anti-war and anti-imperialist movement in the United States, and notes of a rising tide of global resistance to neo-liberalism, yet stops short of discussing a third camp grounded in the struggles of labour movements worldwide. This stop-gap is perhaps the result of what Smith (2008) highlights as Harvey's break from being an advocate of revolutionary theory to that of being "a subversive agent, a fifth columnist inside of the system, with one foot firmly planted in some alternative camp" (Harvey, 2000, 238). Ó Tuathail (2008, 342) questions whether "the world of hard political choices" is avoided by Gregory (2004) in The Colonial Present, with his abstraction from the issue of what an anti-colonial geopolitics would and should actually look like. On the insurgency violence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, Gallaher (2008, 349) queries of Gregory: are these "forms of resistance" and, if so, "what are we to make of their political content?" A demurring Gregory, she observes, evades the question of whether the Left should support any of these resistances. Retort's (2005) Afflicted powers, Castree (2007) also notes, neglects to assess the Left's prospects in opposing capitalism and Islamism and falls short of detailing their call for a non-vanguardist left-international. In sum, he astutely cautions: "this sort of pessimism of the intellect

and the will is as implausible as unalloyed optimism about the immediate future" (Castree, 2007, 569).

As possible routes out of this impasse, Hyndman (2003, 10) proposes "a third space" of feminist geopolitics that goes "beyond the binaries of either/or, here/there, us/them". Developing the work of critical geopolitics while avoiding, she argues, its deconstructive tendencies that are "insufficient to generate change for building alternative futures" (Hyndman, 2003, 4), Hyndman suggests such futures can be mapped via a multi-scalar exploration and knowledge production of the multiple identities, ways of seeing and interventions during the War on Terror. But on the ultimate goal of dismantling and democratising geopolitics, the question of what agency can deliver this remains unanswered. This is unsurprising, since Hyndman's (2003, 10) feminist geopolitics is "an ethnographic, rather than a strategic, perspective", which "does not promote an oppositional stance in relation to particular political principles or acts". The third space of neither/nor then is not to be mistaken for the third camp. So, on the US and UK war in Afghanistan, Hyndman remarks of the virtual invisibility of Afghan women until the Northern Alliance 'victory' in which media images of unveiled women played to Western notions of progress. What is missed, however, is reference to and political engagement with RAWA, which (to date) holds a position that occupies but also goes beyond a third space, by representing a third camp alternative:

> The US "War on terrorism" removed the Taliban regime in October 2001, but it has not removed religious fundamentalism […] [B]y reinstalling the warlords in power in Afghanistan, the US administration is replacing one fundamentalist regime with another […] RAWA believes that freedom and democracy can't be donated; it is the duty of the people of a country to fight and achieve these values. […] Today RAWA's mission for women's rights is far from over and we have to work hard for the establishment of an independent, free, democratic and secular Afghanistan (RAWA, 2006).

Braun and Disch (2002) note of a near impossibility in mobilising for or against the war in Afghanistan when the mission was framed by its rightist advocates in leftist terms (as defending the rights of Afghan women against tyrannical patriarchy), and by its leftist opponents as simply an imperialist war about oil. For them, the binarism of either opposing the war or supporting it in these terms can only be transcended by refusing the articulated discourses altogether, which predetermine our understanding of political connections. The challenge, they state, lies in "[b]ringing the networks out of hiding" (Braun and Disch, 2002, 510) that offer less prescriptive, more promising resistance. Featherstone too (2006) develops a networked approach to leftist anti-war resistance; specifically, the imaginative internationalist politics of transnational networks, which provide a way out of the

binarism that he ascribes in part to the 20th century Marxist Left. He, for instance, contests the nation-centeredness of this Left throughout the Cold War, demonstrative in its doctrine of 'socialism in one country' and its subsequent siding with the USSR. In particular, his concern is that this Left bypassed the "more rhizomorphic, routed and productive practices of solidarity" (Featherstone, 2006, 8) that were occurring during this time, which offered a less hierarchical, more imaginative internationalism (such as E.P. Thompson's involvement in the European Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament during the 1980s that brought together political dissidents on both sides of the Cold War). However, in discussing the 20th century Marxist Left, he omits third camp revolutionary socialists who, during the Cold War, agitated for an internationalist front of independent working class politics as a progressive socialist alternative to capitalism and Stalinism (see next section). On the War on Terror, Featherstone (2006) importantly cautions against both the Left that sides with violent and anti-democratic forms of resistance to imperialism, and the Left that sides with so-called humanitarian imperialist intervention. Instead, he calls for a networked politics that transcends both. This work forms part of a wider post-Marxist relational or networked analysis, which (at its most critical end) is represented by enquiry into the geographies of solidarity and autonomism: "spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation" (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, 730; see also, for example: Routledge, 2008; Pickerill 2007; Featherstone, 2005). From a third camp Marxist perspective, the strength of this analysis lies in its anti-Stalinism, its attention to everyday molecular (but connected) rebellions, which occur within but beyond capitalism, and its internationalism. There is nonetheless a critical departure from the politics of the third camp, rooted in the Italian autonomist Marxists' redefinition of the working class during the 1970s. That is, a shift from the working class as the agency of revolutionary change due to the specific relationship of wage-labour to capital, to that of 'the socialised worker' or 'the multitude', which signify immanent-revolutionary forces evident in new figures of struggle and new subjectivities (Thomas, 2003; see: Hardt and Negri, 2004, 2000). In contradistinction, third camp Marxism politically centres its international solidarity work on class-based struggles and demands, as the foundation of a united revolutionary front for workers and oppressed peoples everywhere.

What thus is the contribution of this paper to critical geographical debate? This paper offers an indirect challenge to Amin and Thrift's (2005) demarcation of an old, and relegated, Marxist Left against a new, present and future, agonistic, affective and networked Left. We have, they argue, arrived at a promising point zero - a Left politics afresh that is free from dogmatic certainties and crude binarisms. Yet at point zero, as Smith (2005b, 893; see also: Harvey, 2006) warns us, it is not one hundred but ninety nine flowers that blossom since "Marxism […]

is the one flower", in Amin and Thrift's schema, "that [...] should instead be choked in its bed". This paper also propounds a third camp Marxism distinct from Harvey's 'fifth column', which reflects "the paradox of optimism amidst a resigned denial of revolution" (Smith, 2008, 153), and from a wider trend, noted by Castree (2007), of radical work infected with a pessimism of both the intellect and the heart. Scattered throughout this paper are quotes from activists and organisations beyond the West resisting an imperialist War on Terror and an Islamist-based political substitute to this, while posing a democratic secular alternative. Their words and struggles indicate an actual basis to the third camp. The Marxism spirited in this paper recognises the basic duty of socialists everywhere to develop labour movement based solidarity with such forces, where and when they exist, as part of an international and sovereign revolutionary offensive.

In sum, this paper challenges both the point zero and the inverted dual camp. Its premise, using the case of the SWP vanguard of the post-9/11 anti-war movement in England, is that a rediscovery of, not a retreat from, the spirit of Marxism offers a critical departure from the inversion of a bourgeois dual camp that subsequently sides with the enemy, i.e., Islamism, of the 'greater enemy' of imperialism. As such, whilst there is a binary straitjacket of leftist anti-war resistance that post-Marxist critical accounts do well to shake off, this paper indirectly challenges the monofication and refutation of Marxism and the subsequent demarcation of a point zero. I seek instead to advance an alternative current of Marxist interpretation - the third camp as opposed to an inverted dual camp - in a modest attempt to rescue a political soul. The first section of this paper illustrates the third camp tradition as laid out in key texts of Hal Draper and Max Shachtman written during the Cold War. Thereafter, in the second section, the anti-war political resistance of the SWP is explored (as profiled in their paper *Socialist Worker*, their magazine *The Socialist Review*, and their periodical *International Socialism Journal*). Specifically, I examine their response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7, their support for the Islamist 'resistance to imperialism' in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and the tenets which bolster their inverted dual camp, that is, their analysis of imperialism, anti-imperialism and Islamism. In the third and final section, the broad united front and wider project of anti-imperialism pursued by the SWP's vanguard of England's anti-war movement is unravelled as, effectively, an evasion of politics in the spirit of the third camp. For this purpose, arguments made by Leon Trotsky on the nature of politics and the products of capitalism are drawn upon.

The third camp

Perhaps the major exemplar of third camp politics during the last century was summed up in the slogan of the former US-based Workers' Party (WP), later renamed the Independent Socialist League (ISL), during the Cold War: "Neither

Washington Nor Moscow, But International Socialism" (Matgamna, 1998). Key writings of two of the founding members of the former revolutionary socialist WP/ISL, Hal Draper and Max Shachtman, contain a definitive elucidation of the third camp tradition. In an article written during the Korean War (1950-1953), and originally printed in Socialist Leader, Shachtman (2006c [1950]) defends the ISL's opposition to both sides of the war against critics who argue that Stalinist totalitarianism is a greater evil to the bourgeois democracy of the US (for example, the former, unlike the latter, prohibits the existence of an independent labour movement), and since there is no actual mass movement against the two, the ISL ought to back the US. The problem with this position, Shachtman (2006c [1950]) reveals, is that it neglects to understand that Stalinism derives its social power by providing an anti-capitalist (albeit reactionary) solution to the social problems of capitalism, which elsewhere are insolvable on a capitalist basis and the official labour movement fails to deal with on a socialist basis. To undermine the social power of Stalinism then, it is essential that "the labour movement throws off all responsibility for the politics of capitalism, its wars included, and leads the way out of the present blind alley of society with an independent programme of socialist reconstruction", and while

> [w]e never promised that we would be able to organise them into an independent movement, packed, wrapped, sealed and delivered by a specified date. We did say that unless they are organised into a movement independent of capitalism and Stalinism, the decay and disintegration of the world would continue, as it has. We did say that the forces of the Third Camp of socialism and liberty are here, and it is our sworn duty to help organise them into an independent movement (Shachtman, 2006c [1950], xi).

Shachtman (2006c [1950]) rebukes both leftist Social-Democrats, for having abandoned the third camp and struggle for socialism (thus offering critical support for American imperialism), and the Fourth International, for failing to understand the third camp by placing Stalinism as part of it. Whereas he points out, as a basis on which to build, the millions of workers in India and Britain who defy both sides of the Cold War. In a debate between Hal Draper and the once third campist Ignazio Silone, originally printed in Labor Action during 1956, Silone defines the position of the third camp as a 'sophism of equidistance', that is, a point of political abstinence midway between two enemies falsely deemed equal in their political dangers (Draper, forthcoming [1956]). Again, this, Silone purports, fails to recognise and act upon the fact that Stalinism is the greater evil to Western imperialism, which must be critically supported. Draper (forthcoming [1956], 17) retorts by directly quoting Silone's previous third campist position (from an interview in 1939) on the question of the war waged by conservative bourgeois democracies against fascism, in order to point out its analogy with Stalinism:

> When the socialists, with the best possible anti-fascist [read: anti-Stalinist] intensions, renounce their own programme, put their own theories in mothballs and accept the negative positions of conservative democracy, they think they are doing their bit in the struggle to crush fascism [Stalinism]. Actually, they leave to fascism [Stalinism] the distinction alone daring to bring forward in public certain problems, thus driving into the fascists' [Stalinists'] arms thousands of workers who do not accept the status quo. (Brackets original)

It is the duty of socialists, Draper (forthcoming [1956]) insists, to resist the enforced dilemma of choosing between the status quo and regression, or one's ruling class and one's ruling class's enemy. But this does not consequently mean that socialists occupy a sophism of equidistance, or that socialists never chose one side over another while maintaining their political independence (see later the distinction between political and military support). Draper (forthcoming [1956]) and Shachtman (2006a [1953], 2006b [1951], 2006c [1950]) do not pretend that both sides in any given conflict are the same but neither do they take individual conflicts (like the 1950-1953 Korean War) in isolation. They maintain that the fight against Stalinism can only be politically won by socialists mobilising the labour movements within which they are active as part of an internationalist, independent political alternative. For instance, Shachtman (2006b [1951], ix) asserts that while a workers' government in the US clearly "cannot come tomorrow morning", it will never be a possibility until American workers decisively break from the capitalist class and "their imperialist course which poisons us with chauvinist ideas and alienates us from the peoples of other lands and them from us". Thus as a practical basis for international workers' solidarity, he asserts that the position of the American labour movement must be for a democratic foreign policy pillared by the unreserved right of all peoples and nations to self-determination (Shachtman, 2006a [1953]). (Ironically, by the 1960s Shachtman himself abandoned third camp politics in favour of critical support for the Western imperialist war camp.)

Writing on the question of anti-imperialism and revolution (originally printed as a discussion guide for the Independent Socialist Club of Berkeley in 1968), Draper (2002 [1969]) observes that a defeat for American imperialism abroad can have the objective effect of galvanising opposition to American capitalism domestically, but this does not imply that socialists should, on this basis alone, politically support any opposing side to an imperialist-waged war. Why? Because one possible domestic outcome is not the only possible outcome, and while a number of phenomena might aid revolutionary conditions domestically, such as hyper-exploitation or recession, socialists plainly do not contend for these conditions. Instead, the decision to support anti-imperialist resistance must be based, consistently, on an assessment of what politics any given side in a war is a continuation of. For this reason, Draper (2002 [1969]) spells out, during war

socialists should not offer political solidarity to an organisation, movement or government merely on the basis that it is an enemy of our enemy; or has widespread support; or is in (or is likely to be in) power; or formally adopts a political programme ostensibly unobjectionable; or is successful in winning over more politically progressive elements than its leadership. The decision to offer political solidarity must be on the basis of what is analysed as "the real political character and real political programme of [its] formation" (Draper, 2002 [1969], 147). Using the case of the Spanish Civil War, Draper (2002 [1969]) also draws an important distinction between political support and military support. He explains that, while revolutionary socialists militarily organised alongside a section of the bourgeois Loyalist government against the Franco-led fascists, they maintained their political independence (which included lending no faith to the bourgeoisie as a trustworthy ally or an effective, sincere force against fascism). Their existence as politically independent, third camp forces in turn offered a political alternative to both the fascists and bourgeois status quo. Whereas, he cautions, the political and military collaboration that occurred between the Stalinist Communist Party and the Loyalist government turned into joint violent suppression of these independent left forces.

The UK-based Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) was once not adverse to these tenets. The former third camp slogan, "Neither Washington Nor Moscow, But International Socialism", was adopted in the late 1960s by the forerunner to the SWP, the International Socialists (IS). It was during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) that the IS/SWP first abandoned the third camp. From originally holding a stance that was against both sides in the conflict - for the reason that for Iran and Iraq the war was being waged for regional imperialist interests - this changed in 1987 (Thomas, 2002a; see: German and Massoumi, 2007; Stack, 2003). As a long-standing SWPer retrospectively comments, "I was back at college when the Iran-Iraq war began. A plague on the houses of both reactionary regimes, I thought […] My view, though, began to change […] [when] [i]t was becoming clear that the west was backing Iraq" (Stack, 2003). The new standpoint was to politically support Iran in view of the fact that the US was offering support to Iraq, not because the politics of which the war was a continuation of, on the part of Iran, had suddenly become progressive. Iran today continues to be positioned by the SWP as a regional bulwark against US imperialist ambition.

The post-9/11 anti-war 'politics' of the SWP

It is a mistake to think of the strategy of suicide bombing as […] an irrationalism that derives from Islamic fundamentalism. There is a rationale for the adoption of this strategy that stems from the problem of defeating an enemy in conditions of extreme inequality of resources

> […] what motivates them to action is rage at material conditions of oppression and exploitation (Jenkins, SWP, 2006).
>
> How can a political movement whose program is based on oppression, injustice and discrimination possibly liberate people from oppression, injustice and discrimination? Political Islam capitalizes on the discontent of people in its struggle for power. Those who see terrorism as the response of desperate, despairing people try to vindicate political Islam and say they "understand" its terrorism. […] While they refer to the injustices of the West and the necessity of struggle against it, they do not find it necessary to struggle against political Islam […] there are two poles of terrorism in today's world which feed off each other. We cannot defeat one pole without curbing the other (Hamid, Worker-communist Party of Iraq, 2005, 4).

The aim of the SWP-initiated StWC (2001) was and remains officially "very simple: to stop the war currently declared by the United States and its allies against 'terrorism'". In 2003 the StWC co-organised, along with the Muslim Association of Britain and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the largest ever demonstration in Britain's history, against the war in Iraq. Part-and-parcel of the SWP vanguard of this anti-war movement is a geopolitical perspective and representation of the barbarous heavy-weights of imperialism (and capitalism) producing and struggling with the provoked reactions of the counter/under-weights of anti-imperialism (and anti-capitalism). A statement by the SWP Central Committee released the day after 9/11 asks:

> Is it so surprising that some group, in rage and desperation at American policies around the world, should have chosen to turn its own methods against the US itself? […] Yesterday's attacks were in fact a stark revelation of the nature of global capitalism. Our rulers believed that they could preside over a world heaving poverty, suffering, and injustice and yet insulate their own metropolises from the consequences. The folly of this belief was exposed as the southern tip of Manhattan disappeared amid smoke and flames (SWP Central Committee, 2001b, 1-2).

A similar statement released four days after 7/7 questions: how could "four ordinary young men from Yorkshire be driven to blow themselves up in London? For Blair and Bush they were barbarians at war with 'our civilisation'" (SWP Central Committee, 2005, 1). The answer? They had witnessed the real barbarity of US, British and Israeli imperialism:

> So, like the rest of us, they will have raged. But they will also have despaired. Then they succumbed, like other desperate young people on every continent at different times over the last 150 years, to the disastrous fantasy that they could rid the world of violence by hurling back a portion of it in some act aimed at innocent people (SWP Central Committee, 2005, 2).

Both statements evade condemnation of the attacks by posing them as tactically misguided venting of otherwise explicable and legitimate anti-imperialist anger, i.e., as simply products of imperialism and capitalism. Critically then, the SWP circumvent any deeper examination of the politics that the attacks were a continuation of, including the implications for progressive democratic, working class forces.

During the War on Terror the SWP's inverted dual camp of imperialist Goliath versus anti-imperialist David has gone further than refusing to condemn Islamist attacks in the West, by offering political support to Islamist 'resistance to imperialism' in the Middle East - in particular, to the Iraqi insurgents (of which the rival Sunni and Shia Islamists have formed the dominant political components (see: Rosen, 2006; Parenti, 2005)), Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestine's Hamas (see: Sagall, 2007, 2003; Ashford, 2006; Harman, 2006; Birchall, 2004). Their rationale: such resistance should be politically supported because it is an enemy to imperialism, has a base of popular support, wields power, and has elements of a political programme that are agreeable. So, the SWP advance, since socialists at home must hold out an "uncompromising opposition to our 'own' imperialist bourgeoisies" (Molyneux, 2004) we ought to be politically lenient on the resistance (in whatever form) against our imperialist powers overseas. Accordingly:

> Sometimes [...] terrorist tactics do more or less merge with the mass resistances of the people, and this certainly affects or should affect the language and tone of our critique. We on the left should not, I suggest, 'condemn' Palestinian suicide bombers or attacks by the Iraqi resistance.

Underpinning this is the calculation that, by upsetting the global imbalance of forces one's prime enemy will be destabilised and the Left at home fortified. In an article aptly titled "Why Opposing Imperialism Means Supporting Resistance", Harman (2006) refers to how the momentum of Vietnamese struggle against US imperialism in the 1960s infused the women's and black movements in the United States, in order to make the case that political support for the Iraqi insurgents can in the long-term yield a destabilization of imperialism over there, and an advancement of the anti-war and anti-capitalist movement over here. This calculation is "despite", he admits, "the attitude to women of some of the resistance groups and

those whose religious bigotry leads them to direct their fire against other Iraqis as much as against the occupying troops" (Harman, 2006, no page).

Leading SWP theoreticians (see: Rees, 2005, 2001; Harman, 2003; Callinicos, 2002) interpret Lenin's and Bukharin's classical accounts of imperialism as explaining the nature of imperialism today. This is understood as the synthesis of geopolitical rivalry between states and economic competition between capitals. Their analysis proceeds that leading the game in this classic-cum-contemporary inter-imperialist rivalry has been the grand strategy of the Bush administration to uphold US geopolitical superiority and impose an Anglo-American model of free market capitalism worldwide (Callinicos, 2002). It is the economic vulnerability of the United States (brought about by ever-increasing internationalisation of finance, investment, production and trade) that, in the interests of its multinationals, has to be redressed by military might (Harman, 2003). And the "'blowback'" of 9/11 has offered greater opportunity for the world's "rogue superpower" to unilaterally go "on the rampage" (Callinicos, 2002), with the war in Iraq demonstrating the application of US military power to ward off inter-imperialist rivalry and secure control of oil (Harman, 2003). On anti-imperialism, Harman (2003) conceptually conflates present-day Islamist resistance in the Middle East with past anti-colonial movements, thus positioning such resistance as part of wider national liberation struggles against present-day colonial-style imperialism. In doing so the critique of Islamism is limited to that of a critique of bourgeois-democratic liberation movements more generally, which, while spurring people "to confront local ruling classes that are tied to imperialism" (giving "rise to near-revolutionary upsurges"), at worst "misdirect those involved […] in a reformist direction" (Harman, 2003, no page). Therefore, for example, the SWP insists that socialist support for the "genuine national liberation movement" resistance against imperialist occupation in Iraq should not be altered by either its "lack of single organisation" or "the insurgency's Islamist colouring" (Alexander and Assaf, 2005). Further still, Rees (2001) argues that the decision on "whether or not to oppose imperialism" cannot simply be based "on whether or not we find the past or present behaviour of the [opposing] regime to be progressive"; instead, it is "determined by the totality of relations in the system at any one point". Oddly the very fact that socialists oppose imperialism appears to be brought into question here, but what he is actually suggesting is that, in the global imbalance of forces, we need to side with the counter/under-weight against the heavy-weight and, in the process, we need not concern ourselves with the politics flowing from the counter/under-weight:

> This does not matter much for those of us who are active in the West building international activity against imperialism and war. We are on the side of Third World movements against imperialism, however

confused their ideas may be. But it is of fundamental importance for Third World revolutionaries (Harman, 2003).

Over here, the SWP theoreticians conclude, we need to concentrate on the defeat of our own imperialist governments, which means being firmly on the side of movements against imperialism over there, and it is the problem of socialists over there to contend with the more reactionary or reformist elements of movements that we over here resolutely support. In brief, the duty of socialists to help build the third camp during the War on Terror is thwarted by an evasion of actual political content, and by a substitution of international workers' solidarity for a commitment to boost the resisting underdog afar and in turn the anti-war and anti-imperialist movement back home.

Fatalist prostration and the evasion of politics

[S]upport for a movement for liberation should not depend on those who lead it at a particular point in time (Harman, SWP, 2006).

[A]n anti-imperialism based on the repression of women, religious minorities, small nationalities, trade unions, peasant organisations, and political parties […] actually performs a function imperialism wants: repression of the masses [...] The anti-imperialism of these religious forces thus actually serves imperialism in the current global scenario. It is the anti-imperialism of fools (Sulehria, Labor Party Pakistan, 2006).

Post 9/11, the SWP has set itself the task of radicalising the anti-capitalist milieu into a particular kind of anti-war - and ultimately "anti-imperialist" - movement, mobilising "politically diverse forces […] around a limited common objective" and ensuring Party comrades are "as militant as possible" (Callinicos, 2002; see also: Callinicos and Nineham, 2007). They conclude that the success of the StWC is due to the execution of a broad united front (see: Callinicos and Nineham, 2007; Ashman, 2003; Callinicos, 2002) reminiscent, in fact, of the Stalinist popular front in which the Party poses as "the champion of unity at all costs and the arch-enemy of 'divisive' debate" while siphoning recruits "by virtue of organisational weight and prestige" (Thomas, 2001, 29). This broad united front is defined as

unity of the basis of opposition to […] war alone, without the addition of other planks (for example, condemnation of terrorism) that may exclude some important potential allies and that imply that the main enemy is anyone but Western imperialism (SWP Central Committee, 2001a, 2-3).

This popular front enables the possibility to unite with virtually any self-declared anti-imperialist force, sentiment or language because of a shared enemy. In other

words, the politics of my enemy's enemy is my friend. Take, for example, the SWP Central Committee's (2006, 1-2) instruction with regard Israel's invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 2006:

> As socialists and internationalists we see our main responsibility as rallying mass opposition in our own countries to this war […] The internationalist and radical left must throw their weight into the balance to help secure a defeat for imperialism that can weaken the global tyranny of capital.

This, in practice, was spelt out in the prominent slogan on England's anti-war demonstrations at the time, "We are all Hizbollah, Boycott Israel".

The SWP claim that, elsewhere in the world, anti-war mobilisations have been hindered by a drive by some imprudent leftists to oppose imperialism and Islamism (Callinicos and Nineham, 2007; Ashman, 2003; SWP Central Committee, 2001a). This is condemned as a political abstentionism rooted in confusion (infecting both the anti-capitalist milieu and sections of the Left) over the question of Islamism. So while public intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn are acclaimed for having stood firm in opposition to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, others on the Left are considered to have floundered. It is remarked, for instance, that Attac's Susan George was, for a period of time, confused over "the question of Islam" (not Islamism?) and foolishly doubted her own opposition to the bombing of Afghanistan (Ashman, 2003). During the Israeli war in Lebanon, Harman (2006) defines those on the Left refusing to support the Islamist Hezbollah as adopting "a 'neither nor' stance". This resembles Silone's mis-definition of the third camp as a sophism of equidistance, or a point of political abstinence halfway between two enemies falsely considered equal in their political dangers. A convenient mis-definition perhaps, for on the part of the SWP the priority of building the biggest counter-weight, anti-imperialist movement does not then need to confront what is abandoned in the process. In other words, domestic political support for Islamist 'resistance to imperialism' afar deserts the actual and potential international basis of the third camp, including labour movement solidarity with political forces, as exemplified by the following statements in relation to the US and UK war in Iraq:

> We are openly against the occupation but we are not part of the armed resistance. We are distant from the Islamic political groups that control the resistance. Their political programme is linked to the conservative Iraqi tradition and they are not interested in the improvement of people's life conditions. We struggle directly – together with the other movements (of workers, progressive women and students) – to defend

> our rights and to establish a civil, lay, secular society (Union of the Unemployed in Iraq, in Longhi, 2004).

> Is it the case that we have to struggle against political Islamic groups? They have already declared their hostile policy and practices against civil life and modernity, and in particular against women, by forcing them to wear veils, and by openly propagating their intension to bring back Sharia law […] Do we have to struggle against another international reactionary force that has occupied Iraq? They have installed the so-called Ruling Council against the will of the people […] The only way is to get organized, and to struggle against all the reactionary forces and not allow them to rule us (Mahmoud, Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, 2003).

The general ramification of the SWP's post-9/11 anti-war 'politics' is that, treating politically retrogressive acts as simply products of capitalism (or an imperialist regime) effectively means substituting vigorous Marxist theory for a "[f]atalist prostration" that evades politics (Trotsky, 1961 [1934], 24), which necessitates identifying what products of capitalism to base ourselves on in their conflict with what others (Thomas, 2002b). On this matter, Trotsky's debate with the ideas propagated in L'Humanite (the former daily newspaper of the French Communist Party, Parti Communiste Français) on the question of workers' defence against the fascists is worth briefly revisiting. During 1934, L'Humanite challenged the use of workers' militias in defence against the fascists. One of the reasons given was that, in responding to the gun shots of the fascists with our own gun shots "we lose sight of the fact that Fascism is the product of the capitalist regime and that in fighting against Fascism it is the entire system which we face" (in Trotsky, 1961 [1934], 23). Trotsky (1961 [1934], 23) astutely replies:

> It is difficult to accumulate in a few lines greater confusion or more errors. It is impossible to defend oneself against the Fascists because they are… "a product of the capitalist regime." That means we have to renounce the whole struggle, for all contemporary social evils are "products of the capitalist system".

So, in a comparative twist with L'Humanite on fascism, when suicide bombers wound and kill ordinary workers in New York, London or Iraq, one suspects the SWP are close to alluding that we "are to sigh philosophically: 'Alas! Murders […] are products of the capitalist system,' and go home with easy consciences" (Trotsky, 1961 [1934], 23-24). What is more, Harman's (1994) insistence that socialists must not regard Islamists "as our prime enemies" because "[t]hey are not responsible for the system of international capitalism" and are instead its products, has, post-9/11, gone one stage further; with the SWP putting into effect his

argument that, their "feeling of revolt" can "be tapped for progressive purposes" so "[o]n some issues we will find ourselves on the same side […] against imperialism and the state". 'Alas' once more, a revolutionary socialist commitment to equality is translated into a gamble to boost strategically weaker enemies to bring them on par with strategically stronger ones (Thomas, 2002a).

What the SWP schema misses is that while the growth of Islamism is a product of capitalism, "the increase in the misery and the revolt of the proletariat are also products of capitalism" (Trotsky, 1961 [1934], 24). And socialists have a duty to choose what products of capitalism to base ourselves on (most obviously, the working class) and to politically develop these products (as part of a third camp) in their/our struggle against other products of capitalism that are detrimental to their/our ultimate emancipation. Perhaps the SWP will retort, echoing L'Humanite, that it is the whole capitalist system we have to deal with. But "[h]ow?", echoing Trotsky, "[o]ver the heads of human beings?" (Trotsky, 1961 [1934], 24).

Conclusion

> In times of war, the frontiers will be altered, military victories and defeats will alternate with each other, political regimes will shift. Workers will be able to profit to the full from this monstrous chaos only if they occupy themselves not by acting as supervisors of the historical process but by engaging in the class struggle. Only the growth of their international offensive will put an end not alone to episodic "dangers" but also to their main source: class society. (Trotsky, 2006 [1939], iv)

The account offered by this paper is that of a revolutionary socialist organisation, which heads an anti-war movement in the West during the proclaimed War on Terror with a precarious, politically-compromised perspective of the inverted dual camp: a flipping inside-outside of bourgeois promotions of worldwide conflicts as between the status quo and regression, into socialistic representations of battles between David and Goliath. In the process of prioritising one enemy to be defeated, a systematic examination of what politics flow from David and Goliath, and specifically the corollaries thereof for the development of an international sovereign offensive of the working class, is bypassed. Instead, it is deduced that by throwing one's weight behind David the imbalance of forces can be turned against the prime enemy of Goliath. Critical geographers should recognise the anti-war 'politics' of the UK-based SWP as part of a wider political malady infecting the Left, including parts of critical academia. A symptom of this malady is a gut anti-imperialism, which tempts leftists in the West, wishing the defeat of the usual imperialist suspects abroad (aka the United States, Britain and Israel), to

instinctively give political support to an opposing side. In its place a third camp anti-war resistance needs to be advanced. This anti-war resistance can be strengthened by labour movements in the West (including our own academic trade unions) fully engaging in international political solidarity work with forces that occupy the frontline (and third front) of workers' and oppressed peoples' struggles against imperialism and its reactionary enemies, and for progressive, democratic secular alternatives. Within and beyond Marxist, autonomist and post-Marxist critical geography, this paper calls for a return to the very spirit or vital guiding principles of Marxism. This requires reopenings of, and debates on, original Marxist ideas and practices that have been prematurely assumed defunct.

In sum, the bourgeois dual camp and its leftist inversion reduce socialists to geopolitical gamblers who hedge bets on a return that might generate the most anti-imperialist conditions, and reduce workers to mere supervisors of history, bankrupt of any agency to steer and change its course. Third camp Marxism stipulates independent working class politics as a fundamental prerequisite for the survival of humanity. While the international third front is not, at present, anywhere near to being a fully-fledged force, its dialectical foundations are nevertheless in existence everywhere and the political task of advancing these is, this paper suggests, one worth fighting for.

Acknowledgements

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