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“War against terrorism” is an imperialist offensive

It is now the endgame in America's war against the Taliban. The United Front Northern Alliance has claimed Kabul, formed a government acceptable to US imperialism. The imperialists have offered billions in aid. The war is going on but essentially it is a mopping up operation. There is no doubt that the US imperialist forces have won.

A US puppet government is not a satisfactory solution for the Afghani people. The imperialists look forward to plundering Afghani resources. An imperialist backed Afghanistan will be a very important base should the peoples of Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan try to rebel and pressure the Islamic republic of Iran.

There is serious doubt over whether the Northern Alliance can even form a stable government, let alone a progressive one. After all the Northern Alliance only came together because of a common need to fight the Taliban. All its constituent groupings are reactionary. In fact fighting between the groupings allowed the Taliban to come to power who gained support in the name of morality and stability. It is only imperialist guns which are holding the rag tag reactionary grouping together. Hardly a satisfactory solution for the Afghan people.

Was America's war justified? The Taliban did not blow up the World Trade Center and at the time of invasion there was no serious proof that El Qaida was responsible. There was no serious attempt to negotiate with the Taliban. The Taliban had every right to demand proof. Even if we accept the current proof offered it is a case of charge in and invade first - prove later. The Taliban had actually promised to hand over Bin Laden had proof been provided.

The Taliban were a thoroughly barbaric and reactionary regime. With their banning of alcohol and even music. And their treatment of women it is easy to paint them as extreme reactionaries they are. But bloody invasion, especially by America, is not the way to deal with reaction. What about the innocent Afghanis? There have been more killed by this invasion than by the terror raid of September 11!

But far more serious is what the "war against terrorism" means on a world scale US imperialism virtually backed by everyone has demanded and taken the right to invade any country "which nurtures terrorists". Naturally, they determine who the terrorists are. In Somalia they have closed the main national bank on the grounds of "sending money to El Qaida". Their claims have been challenged. But the victims of this are innocent Somalis who depend on money sent from USA and Britain from relatives working there.

Since rampant counter-revolution triumphed in the post capitalist states, national liberation movements have been isolated. Often this has led to desperate tactics many of which we do not condone. Though their cause is just they are often attacked as "terrorists". We, the workers movement, must break through the isolation by defending the self-determination of Basques, Tamils, and Kashmiri's unconditionally.

The USA is trying to dispense with international law, giving itself the right to invade any country whatsoever. They are also

dispensing with international law for individuals. The Taliban are chucked in cages in the USA base at Guantanamo Cuba. Whilst we too detest the Taliban the only crime of many of their ranks is to practice their reactionary religion and defend their country. They deserve prisoner of war status. Australian David Hicks is held there. It is suggested by his father that he is only a religious fanatic caught up in an unfortunate situation. Has it been shown otherwise? The Australian media condemn him on pretty flimsy grounds in order to whip up their reactionary hysteria.

As we have said workers in this country must in no way identify with the war drive. On the contrary, we must actively fight against it. The so-called "war against terror" is a rationalisation for the maintenance of imperialist super-exploitation through repressive regimes throughout the world.

As we write George Bush is making a reactionary sabre-rattling speech. He has extended the war against terrorism to a war against those states with weapons of potential mass destruction. He has named specifically Iran, Iraq and North Korea. These states apparently constitute a threat and Bush does not intend to wait for something to happen. This will mean some sort of military force.

Workers of the world, including Australia must in no way be party to this offensive. The imperialist war drive must be opposed not just with words but with action. This means workers' direct action against war or any military action threatened. Iran, Iraq and North Korea must be fully defended from imperialist attack.

Iraq: Australian battle ships enforce reactionary blockade

Over a decade ago there was a full scale military war in the Gulf. Iraq led by Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait George Bush Senior couldn't let him get away with it. The Gulf war hasn't really stopped. Instead of the troops and the bombing we have the quiet but equally effective weapon - the blockade. Although it is not as spectacular as the bombs falling down, it does the same dirty work the slow way. Iraqis die by deprivation of medicines and food. America is still ten years after the war hell bent on making Iraq pay for the invasion of Kuwait. In fact it is making ordinary Iraqis pay. Many commentators have pointed out that sanctions have act' ally strengthened the authority of Saddam amongst Arab states and amongst his own people. But the murderous barbaric blockades go on. Revolutionaries support the overthrow of Saddam by only one means - the revolutionary mobilisation of the Iraqi workers and peasants.

Revolutionary communists opposed totally the imperialist war drive. We defended Iraq and supported its military victory. Kuwait is a rigged state created by imperialism to facilitate the plunder of oil. Good riddance to it! We have also opposed any subsequent blockade.

It is now especially urgent that Australian workers act because Howard has volunteered Australian warships to play a prominent role in Bush's blockade.

Argentina: revolution or barbarism?

There has been a bit of news in the Australian media about Argentina. We have learned about changes in government and presidency. Understandably no one wanted to be President of Argentina. Occasionally we see angry middle class people - angry about the government closing banks and freezing assets. We read about the collapse of the national airline Aerolinas Argentinas- a collapse far more serious than Ansett's. We get a bit of the picture. What isn't coming through is the total and thorough bankruptcy of Argentinean capitalism and the total desperation of every class in that country.

The militancy which we hear about is only the tip of the iceberg. There have been seven general strikes. Nor are we told about hundreds of thousands taking to the streets of every major city, in protest against austerity policies. The crisis in Argentina is so massive that it could shake assumptions about capitalism forever- in Australia as well as over there. The ruling class has every interest in keeping the real facts about Argentina hidden.

Argentina has a massive foreign debt problem. This poses the question: pay or not to pay? No self respecting capitalist wants to default totally. The real question for them is the schedule of repayment? The imperialists want their money back. But the price is immense. Already before the latest intensification whole provinces have been deprived of any money whatsoever for

basics such as schools, hospitals and education.

President Duhalde, a Peronist, is trying to play a balancing game between international finance capital and the pressure of the masses. He has reversed some economic rationalist policies and restored some government intervention. For this he is attacked by that organ of finance capital Britain's Financial Times

The imperialists want even lower wages. But the wages many Argentinean workers receive are barely above the survival line, let alone the poverty line. The official unemployment rate is 20%. This figure is considered a massive understatement.

The imperialists also fear the possibility of massive disruption coming from both the middle class and more seriously - the working class. Building a revolutionary party is a matter of urgency for the working people of Argentina. Unless this happens there could be a massive and painful defeat. Perhaps the fascists will organise. Though not a serious force now, their victory is not out of the question especially the strong nationalist Peronist influence which dominates the workers movement as well as angry and desperate middle class people.

There is an unfortunate contradiction between the militancy, heroism and capacity for struggle of working class, unemployed and middle class people as compared to their low political level of consciousness. A representative of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) participated in the December 28 mobilisation. He noted in a report published on the net by Argentine Solidarity Group that at this massive mobilisation of a hundred thousand in Buenos Aires, the left's presence was negligible, barely existent. There were no banners, barely any paper sellers and the predominant colours were the blue and white of the Argentinean flag. This domination of bourgeois consciousness spells disaster.

Yet Argentina has had a numerically strong, ostensibly Trotskyism movement. The Morenoites have had tens of thousands of members. Yet they have no hegemony when the alternative is posed starkly revolution or austerity. The hegemony of Peronism is still very strong and dominates the trade union bureaucracy. The Morenoites have failed to fight it.

Argentina has many similarities to Australia. It has a resource based economy. It has been relatively privileged semi-colony. One notable difference has been the desire and the capacity of national bourgeois forces to stand up to imperialism. General Galtieri fought Britain to attempt to retake the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands. Britain uses these to enforce imperialist domination. In no way has any Australian mainstream political party ever wanted to take over the US bases. Of course there are differences such as Australia having a more diverse economy (mining) and a mini-imperialist domain. Australia also has a strong tourist industry. These differences mean for the moment Australia is comfy while Argentina is in dire straits but make no mistake, Australia is in no way immune from capitalist collapse.

In Argentina the main banner of national consciousness is the banner of Peron. Peronism has had ties with trade unions. Basically it has sold itself to the bourgeoisie on the basis of its capacity to strangle trade union struggle, turning unions into tame cats. In today's economic rationalist climate even recognition of trade unions appears left wing. The Allianza Government of De La Rúa was a left break from Peronism - which went drastically to the right. De La Rúa discovered his "responsibility" to the IMF - and made the middle classes working people and unemployed pay. Such a split reinforced Peronism. Peronism also has authority because it is seen as representing a strong Argentina both politically and economically. Today, of course it only acts as an agent of reconciliation, softening the blow of imperialism rather than fighting it. It still basks in yesterday's grandeur. In short it is a serious barrier to workers developing independent political consciousness. This is especially true when sections of the left adapt to it.

A healthy development has been the development of Popular Assemblies which have formed "more or less spontaneously,, (according to one observer) in the neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires. Are these soviets as some have suggested? We think that they have the potential for becoming so if the working class can gain hegemony These Assemblies have been instrumental in developing mass militant action. The carcerolada, a protest of people banging pots and pans in the street on December 29 was called by the Popular Assemblies. The aim of this was to demand the cancellation the 13% cut in pensions, the creation of a million jobs and the creation of a

third currency the Argentino, the suspension of the State of Siege, a declaration of a moratorium of the debt. All of the above are bourgeois demands.

There have been suggestions of unity between the Popular Assemblies and the massive and militant unemployed movement. This is of course a step forward. The militant unemployed believe in direct action against the system. According to the LWI representative their ideology and consciousness is Maoist. This is better than those Argentineans who merely react with anger whilst still remaining within a patriotic political framework. However, it is not revolutionary communism.

In Argentina today there is every component of a revolutionary situation; the desperation of the middle classes, who see their savings dwindling into nothing. At the moment they can't even withdraw their money from the bank; the militancy of working people prepared to take part in general strike action. They fear wages so low that they could barely survive; the militancy and anger of the unemployed movement- a mass movement of millions who are prepared to block highways to demand an existence.

What is seriously lacking in Argentina is revolutionary consciousness. The working class must not only be prepared to fight (general strike etc), it must be conscious of its antagonism to the capitalist system. This means it must have a programme to overthrow it, to expropriate the ruling class, to form a workers' and small farmers' government.

To be victorious the working class must win programmatically sections of other classes to its hegemony. This means raising democratic demands such as a constituent assembly. This means raising demands specific to sections of the middle classes. The liquidation of rural debt and the nationalisation of the land are two key demands. Farmers must gravitate between either of the two decisive classes, the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, unless there is a fascist movement to co-opt them into counter-revolution. Workers must ensure that small farmers are on our side. The demand: workers and small farmers government stresses the need for workers to win over small farmers. Given the importance of rural industries to the Argentine economy this is vital for the revolution.

The unemployed movement in Argentina has been really inspiring and militant. In fact the current struggles show the potential for the unemployed as a detonator for revolutionary struggle, Unemployed must be united with employed workers under the revolutionary banner.

An important demand for this is the shortening of the working week until everyone is employed. This must be achieved without loss of pay. This demand is actually being raised in Argentina.

Workers must fight the state. Well certainly the state is very well prepared to fight them since December we have witnessed 35 killed thousands wounded and 4,500 arrested. Workers and unemployed are physically prepared to fight the state. This is good. But this must not be confused with the political consciousness and programme to smash the state. This they lack.

The imperialists are indeed desperate. And this desperation is shown by their conference called the Porto Alegre Forum This "forum" is an alliance of imperialists, compradors and allies discussing how to smash popular upsurges against imperialism and revolutions. Also hanging on are social democrats, stalinists (notably Cuba) and various revisionists. In no way should revolutionaries be party to such a conference

The situation in Argentina has lessons for workers and revolutionaries world-wide. It shows starkly that capitalism has, far from overcoming its contradictions, the capacity for collapse. What is happening in Argentina today could be happening in Australia (and other countries) tomorrow. This is the message we must convey to workers - in Australia and around the world.

We must also be prepared politically so the protest that will emerge will be channeled into a struggle to fight the system itself. Hopefully we will beat the system before an Argentine situation emerges.

Meanwhile in Argentina the stark choice is revolution or barbarism. And things will only be resolved in a revolutionary way if a revolutionary communist party is forged. This is a life or death question for working people, the poor, oppressed and even large sections of the middle classes in Argentina today.

For a workers and small farmers' government!

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Argentina has a massive foreign debt problem. This poses the question: pay or not to pay? No respectable capitalist wants to default totally. The real question for them is the schedule of repayment?⁷ The imperialists want their money back. But the price is immense. Already before the latest intensification, whole provinces have been deprived of any money whatsoever for basics such as schools, housing and education.

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ACTU "Reasonable Hours" selling out the shorter working week

The working week in Australia in terms of hours worked is horrendous. As has been pointed out by the Sydney Morning Herald, the situation is even worse than in the convict days. The maximum time that convicts worked was a fifty hour week. In Australia today fifty hours is very much the norm. The Herald found one forklift driver who often worked a seventy hour week. Australia has the second highest working week of any OECD country. Only in South Korea do workers work longer. But in that country the government, workers and bosses are negotiating for the working week to be shortened with all parties agreeing to this in principle. In Australia there are no such negotiations. In fact no one is seriously fighting for a reduction of the working week for all though it has been raised in some trade union awards.

It has to be said that the trade union bureaucracy is very well aware of what excessive working hours means for workers. It means disruption to relationships and family. It causes stress and fatigue and this means more accidents. It impairs workers' health. It means workers have little time for recreation. All this is being eloquently argued by Richard Marles in the ACTU case for "reasonable hours".

The bosses and the government are opposing the bureaucrats claim. They claim that whilst workers having more leisure would be a good thing, they want the issue dealt with in enterprise agreements 3s opposed to awards. In other words if you have an unprofitable boss or your shop floor organisation is too weak to withstand bosses pressure it is bad luck - you are condemned to working extreme working conditions

Basically what the ACTU are doing is humanising the situation. They want workers to be able to refuse overtime if they have a prior engagement of a family commitment. They also want an extra day off on full pay if workers work, for example, six days in a row. What they are explicitly not doing is fighting for a cap on the working hours. Nor are they fighting for a cap on overtime. Sharan Burrow ACTU President has in the context of this campaign said that Unions, bosses and governments should get together to discuss the length of the working week. Sharan has also denounced the prices and Incomes Accord but she applies the same logic when it comes to a shorter working week. This is class collaboration. The shorter working week should be fought for unconditionally irrespective of the will, desire of or the capacity of the bosses to support the demand. We must put our lives before their profits.

Of course if they are successful some workers will be better off. But basically the working hours that the ACTU are still prepared to tolerate are still pretty barbaric. In no way is the fifty hour week under challenge. In no way will the very minor improvements provide jobs. In no way will the bosses be forced to employ more workers. In fact it can be argued that bosses, thanks to the ACTU effort, can force workers to do overtime as long as it's "reasonable" and as long as personal circumstances are considered. Basically the ACTU has sold out the struggle for a shorter working week which has been ACTU policy throughout the twentieth century. Now even the lip service is gone.

The ACTU's position is even more treacherous when it is looked at in an international context. Throughout Europe there is an acknowledgement that the working week is too long and workers need to work less. In France and Italy there has been legislation introduced for the shorter working week. It is now the law that workers work a thirty-five hour week. Of course there are strings attached which must be opposed. In no way does Communist Left consider these limited gains sufficient. We oppose any conditions. The shorter working week must be supported without loss of pay. Make the bosses pay!

The point is that in other countries the workers movement is going in the right direction, acknowledging that workers must work

less. Only in Australia do we appear to be marking time. Here the union bureaucracy is trying to humanise an oppressive situation - permitting the bosses to enforce long working hours.

These bureaucrats must be removed. By condoning long working hours even in a more humane form they are acting against the interests of working people. This betrayal should not be seen as an accident. It is a product of both their bureaucratic position, a privileged caste acting as a conducting medium between labour and capital, and their reformist politics. The Accord may be dead. But unfortunately class collaboration lives.

The point is that to fight consistently for a shorter working week without loss of pay and conditions, you must reject the domination of the laws of profit. You must be a revolutionary.

Zimbabwe: the hue and cry against Robert Mugabe

The European Union has now announced what it call smart sanctions against Zimbabwe. The US imperialists are now following suite. And so is Australia. There has been talk about kicking Zimbabwe out of the Commonwealth. Zimbabwe led by Mugabe is in the imperialist's bad book. There are a lot of bad things about Zimbabwe. The lack of basic rights in that country affects working people. But Zimbabwe is hardly unique. Hundreds of countries have rigged elections and state repression. Mugabe is unique and under attack because he is attacking the property rights of privileged land owners. This the imperialists can't stomach.

Mugabe's problems stem from his basically stalinist strategy for revolution. After victory over the Smith regime he made peace with rich white land owners. This elite was basically the backbone of Rhodesian apartheid. They had stolen the land from Africans. They super-exploited African workers. They had a privileged life under Smith. This continued under Mugabe. Having been legitimised it now seems illegal and immoral that they should be displaced. So there is an international hue and cry about defending "poor" rich white farmers.

Revolutionary communists have no sympathy for these people whatsoever. Mugabe should have expropriated them immediately on coming to power. Delaying the process has only weakened his position, his position is also weakened by the lack of rights and state repression for black proletarians. This is giving them a stronger social base. This gives them the appearance of fighting for a general social justice as opposed to merely fighting for themselves.

One issue Mugabe is extremely reactionary on is gay rights. In fact he has used this as a banner to attack British Prime Minister Tony Blair. This has prompted a reaction from British gay activist Peter Tatchell. Tatchell tried to come to Australia (the country from which he migrated) for the commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Brisbane (which wasn't held). He was deprived entry to Australia by the Howard government. Their reason was because he made public his intent to make a citizens arrest on Robert Mugabe.

Whilst we defend his right to enter this country, we must oppose his plan as reactionary. Mugabe is probably guilty of many crimes, but the question is how should he be dealt with. To utilise international law or the law of an imperialist country is to legitimise imperialist domination. Mugabe is not merely a person, he is head of state. And the crimes alleged are in that capacity. Tatchell in attempting to enforce "international legality" is basically depriving the Zimbabwean people of the right to determine their leader and political direction. His campaign is also a diversion. Britain and the US are one thousand times more reactionary than Robert Mugabe. They maintain tyranny throughout the world for the benefit of super-profits.

Mugabe must be removed. But the only way he can be removed in a progressive way is by the mobilisation of the Zimbabwean workers and peasants. They and they alone should try Mugabe. We are convinced he will be found guilty of many crimes We think the fact that he permitted white privileged landowners to maintain their ownership for so long was a crime against the

working people poor and oppressed of that country. If imperialist tries Mugabe, or if it takes action such as sanctions, it will only be to facilitate counter-revolution, to enhance the elite and perpetuate the plunder of the multinational

The fact that Zimbabwe remains part of the Commonwealth is indeed a reflection on the Mugabe regime. No decent progressive person would have anything to do with that reactionary institution which legitimises and facilitates the British Empire. But to be part of it or not should be the choice of Zimbabwe. We hope Zimbabwe chooses to leave for the appropriate political reasons. Also any attempt to focus on Zimbabwe diverts attention from the reactionary role of British imperialism.

We hope the working people get rid of Mugabe and cronies. But this must be done in a way which facilitates progress not reaction. The "democratic" campaign of the imperialists is aimed to facilitate the control of superprofit and empower reactionaries. It therefore must be totally opposed.