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The invasion. One year after "victory"

Just over a year ago, there were heady days for the Coalition and its Iraqi allies. They declared victory in their invasion whilst realising that they had a civil war on their hands. They sure have. But there is no indication on when the war will be over. Iraqi puppet Chaludi suggests a year and a half. But British military claim they could be stuck there for up to ten years, Inspiring pictures of Iraqis and US forces uniting to pull down the statue of Saddam Hussein are now just distant memories.

America has declared that Baathists not guilty of serious crimes will now be allowed to become part of the provisional government. Previously they had declared the Baathist Party totally illegal. This is a recognition that the Baathists at least have some social force on their side. It is also an attempt to placate Baathist forces who are fighting them. They have no significant internal grouping prepared to back the imperialists except perhaps the Kurds who stay within their region. Of course they have a major religious division within the country to deal with. Saddam's regime was Sunni chauvinist. But Shiites are the majority. Sunnis fear that with majority rule things will be reversed at their expense. What has clearly been refuted is the pied piper of democracy. theory promoted by Paul Wolfowitz. According to this theory All America thought it had to do is waltz into Baghdad, the Iraqi people would hail them as saviours and there would be a flow on of democratic revolutions throughout the Middle East. One year after the invasion, the war gets bloodier and bloodier and Iraq's future seems less and less certain. The official hand over proposed for June 30 simply doesn't matter even if it happens. America will remain in control over everything decisive. This includes the economy and the war. The Iraqi regime will be a powerless puppet. There is much talk over whether Iraq is America's new Vietnam. Well there are similarities and. differences. The similarity is that America is being bogged down in an indefinite war against an enemy, invisible because it constitutes the people. But the differences are significant. In Vietnam America at least had support from at least a minority of the population- the comprador bourgeoisie, In Iraq they represent no significant section. In Vietnam, their opponents were united around a coherent philosophy - a variant of nationalist stalinism. No such cohesion exists amongst the Iraqi opposition. They include Baathists, Sunnis and radical Shiites, supporters of El Qaeda. There are reports of opponents putting aside differences to fight their common enemy - the American invader How this will be resolved is not clear. But America faces a determined opposition .prepared to fight to the death.

Mark Latham has recently played his hand. It sent the cat amongst the pigeons. Mark promised that a Labor Federal government would withdraw all troops, home for Christmas. He has been strongly denounced by the Iraqi provisional government the US imperialists and of course, the Liberals. Latham pointed out that Australia is too stretched in its defence. He is playing on parochial Australian sentiment He points out that even the RSL has attacked Howard for not having an exit strategy and be5'ides Labor opposed the invasion anyway.

After this announcement, both Latham and Labor lost electoral ground according to the opinion polls. We think that the polls probably accurately reflect public opinion. So if they do were his efforts worth it. Yes. Iraq is one issue which cannot be sidestepped. A local issues Labor would not be credible. He also knows that to be credible in the future he has to take a stand now - before it is blatantly clear to even blind Freddie that the war is a devastating failure.

So what do we think of his efforts? Firstly leaving it to Christmas is leaving it too long. The troops simply shouldn't be there at all. We should feel no obligation whatsoever to feel responsible to the imperialists. They invaded an innocent country under false pretenses. They created the mess. They should pay. But perhaps more significant, Latham respects the electoral process. If he loses the next election, he will do nothing for three years until the next except politely opposing Howard from the confines of parliament. Latham has no concept of mobilising the working class. The idea is totally alien to his thinking,

John Howard is, of course totally heartedly committed to the war effort. He went to Iraq on ANZAC day to prove it. Now, he assures us his government is preparing for at least another year of occupation. Of course he has the full backing of America who need all the support they can get as countries are now beginning to depart the Coalition. How this will pay off electorally will depend on how things get resolved. At the moment no Aussie soldier has died in Iraq. America is being bogged down but peripheral Australia with its limited commitment may not suffer too dearly. If Howard is seen as a winner without too much cost he will probably be an electoral winner with the Australian public. But if the price is too high Latham will triumph.

Latham may be prepared to wait. We mustn't. Workers action against the war must begin now!

Within this society only one class has the interest to and the capacity to fight the imperialist war in Iraq - to smash this imperialist war in Iraq. In the past Australian workers have acted. They have acted in defence of Indonesian independence, East Timorese independence, with the people of Bougainville, in solidarity with the people of Vietnam and IndoChina fighting imperialism. And with the right leadership they will act again - against Australian intervention in Iraq.

We are nor suggesting that the task will be easy. The union movement has significantly degenerated since the sixties and the seventies. Nevertheless one over-riding fact remains. If workers are party to the imperialist war drive against Iraq or elsewhere than they cannot fight the offensive against working people in Australia. That is the case we must put to working people, as individuals and through their unions. Of course the trade union leadership cannot be totally by-passed. Resolutions must be moved at the appropriate general meetings. But it is possible that if the leadership do not Act then the rank and file, through factory or shop committees might. This should be encouraged.

Basically working class action means direct action. This includes black bans, pickets (of munitions factories for example) and strike action, Dock workers should black all shipping connected to the war effort.

It is important to have demonstrations. But these must orient to mobilising the working class and not pressuring the government. We have no faith in the capitalist state to take a principled anti imperialist position -irrespective of who is in government. The point should be to mobilise workers and not students. We must have no faith in bourgeois forces (the Democrats) or moral opposition (the Churches) or petty bourgeois radicalism (the Greens). Certainly liquidating a class line to include these forces is treachery.

It is not too late to build such a movement. But revisionists such as Socialist Alternative and those under the Socialist Alliance umbrella refuse to do it. Their methodology harks back to the Vietnam. But imperialism was not defeated by morality and might of numbers. It was defeated by actions such as those of the wharfies and the military victory of the Vietcong.

Oil robbery under the Timor Sea

East Timor wants its oil back. It claims that the division of oil control within the Timor Sea is unfair. We agree. Timor is paying the price of being "liberated" by Australia

These days it appears to be cool to support the Australian military tradition. In the past young people correctly knocked ANZAC Day as worshipping imperialism bloodshed and warfare. Today diggers are seen as cool groovy people who sacrificed to defend Australia. It has been forgotten that Australia has been either a lackey to imperialism or played an imperialist role in its own right.

One episode which has contributed to this change of image was Australia's intervention to defend East Timor. It must be stressed that for the previous four decades, Australia backed Indonesia, to the hilt. Australian governments. Labor and Liberal backed Indonesia and its military junta to the hilt. They did not flinch even when it was exposed that hundreds of thousands of Timorese had been killed.

Billy MacMahon made it clear to Indonesia that Australia would not oppose the takeover. But Gough Whitlam was far more committed to Indonesia. His idea of strong centralised states in the South Pacific meant philosophical as well as practical opposition to independence, not just for Timor but Bougainville also. Representatives of FRETILIN came to Australia and lobbied all parties, including the Liberals. They pleaded that they weren't communists but bourgeois nationalists (this was true). But it didn't stop the Liberals from wholeheartedly supporting Indonesia and denouncing them as communists.

During October 1975 the Democratic Republic of East Timor was established. This was overthrown in December that year whilst Australia was in the midst of a constitutional crisis. The incoming Fraser Government showed solidarity with Indonesia by closing down FRETILIN's radio transmitter in Darwin. When news came through of the massacre of East Timorese civilians Fraser maintained his solidarity with Indonesia. The Hawke and Keating governments did likewise despite opposition from within the Labor Party

murder future leaders of Hamas. Israel is demanding the right to kill with impunity. Using the war against terrorism as a pretext, it argues that Israel is legal and its opponents "terrorists". US imperialism has general agreement but it warns Israel not to kill Yassar Arafat who their eyes is a leader which represents relative stability.

Irrespective of international legality, it is the Palestinians who we must support. They were dispossessed and kicked into the desert. Only recently, after decades of fighting as any form of ministate been recognised by Israel or the imperialists. This ministate is totally unsatisfactory. We must stand for military victory for the Palestinians against Israel and imperialism.

Australia only changed course when it realised that it had something to gain. FRETILIN has every reason to be angry at the deal imposed upon it. The Timorese only get access to oil under their continental shelf. Australia gets the rest. As the Timorese point out, Timor is a poor country which needs infrastructure such as schools and health services. Of course there is still much reconstruction to be carried out after a long war. Timor needs oil to pay for it. Whilst coffee exports and tourism can supply a bit of money, oil is the export needed to get the necessary money for reconstruction. That is as long as Australia doesn't pinch it all.

We wish the Timorese all the best in their negotiations for a better deal. But the Timorese need more than wishes, they need force. The workers movement must back the Timorese with strike action to enforce a fair deal — to give the Timorese control over their oil!

When Indonesia threatened Timor and then invaded, there was action on Australian waterfronts — throughout Australia. This must happen again.

Israel steals Palestinian land and kills their leadership with impunity.

Israeli war criminal Sharon has just returned from the United States in triumph. He has successfully persuaded George Bush the merits of new peace proposals which maybe imposed on the Palestinian people. Basically Israel claims part of the West Bank occupied by Jewish settlers. The Palestinian people are understandably angry. Basically George Bush is endorsing land stealing.

Tony Blair disagrees with this. As he has observed Bush has abandoned his neutral pretext and has come around to virtually wholeheartedly endorsing Israel. This is to be expected.

The Israeli's have also declared their right to kill Palestinian leaders, notably Hamas, with impunity. This year they have murdered Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his successor Abdul Aziz Rantisi. They have promised to

Guantanamo Bay. Free the prisoners

After two years being detained in hell, David Hicks is finally going to face trial by the US military authorities. It has been difficult for the authorities to work out how to handle Hicks legally. Hicks is an Australian Muslim. He went on a pilgrimage to Pakistan and then Afghanistan. He fought with the Taleban against the Northern Alliance. He has never been a combatant against the United States. So what's his crime?

The Australian government can't find a charge for him either. According to a US interrogator, Hicks trained under EI

Quaida but refused to become involved in suicide bombing. This was before Howard declared it a crime to be trained by terrorist grouping including El Quaida. The Americans it appears have now found a charge to pin on him. He will be appearing in a military tribunal which his lawyers fear, will not give him a fair go as it is not bound by the same rules of evidence as a civil court. No matter how misguided Hicks may be to get involved in such a reactionary movement he is still not a war criminal.

David is just one of prisoners in Guantanamo many cooped up like chickens, deprived of basic rights such as contact with families and legal assistance. This barbarity has been rationalised by September eleven and the war against terrorism. But many of the prisoners did not even know about the horrific terror raids, let alone condone them and let alone party to them. As an English speaking Australian citizen, Hicks is more fortunate than Afghans Pakistanis Arabs and others who do not have the same publicity, legal back up and concerned family prepared to go to America to put their case. But they might be even greater victims of injustice. Many are no doubt simple soldiers who believed they were defending their country.

Communist Left calls for the release of all from Guantanamo without exception. This includes those who are hardened terrorists and not merely (like Hicks caught up in an unfortunate situation. We oppose the imprisonment because we oppose the US invasion of Afghanistan.

The Taleban were not responsible for September eleven. They have cooperated with El Quaida and it was acknowledged that Osama Bin Laden was camped in Afghanistan with their consent. Before charging in and invading there was some onus on the US to negotiate for his hand over. But this they refused to do. In fact the Taleban authorities offered to hand over Bin Laden so long as the Americans could provide proof. The Americans didnt negotiate, they invaded. And whilst their Northern Alliance allies control Kabul there is still plenty of countryside under Taleban control. The war is a long way from being over yet.

Actually, it didnt matter what the Taleban did or didn't do, America wanted a war anyway. The world superpower could not be seen as a weak victim. Actually, the eyes of many of the hawks of the Bush administration were on Iraq who they assumed must be involved without even a glimmer of evidence. Cohn Powell persuaded them to see sense. After September eleven America had the sympathies of virtually the whole world. An invasion of Iraq, he argued correctly, would have blown this support away. Invading Afghanistan appeased the hawks. It enabled America to show the world who was boss and that it wouldn't take the terror raids lying down. It then prepared the ground to invade Iraq. giving this a veneer of respectability with falsified arguments about "weapons of mass destruction" All this has not stopped El Quaida as the Bali bombings and the recent bombings in Spain have shown

The Taleban has been and is, a force for reaction. It was promoted by the US to counter the Soviet sponsored regime there. This regime was far more liberal and progressive than any other regime in the area, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq etc. Bjt for the sake of world imperialist control. the Soviets had to be taught a lesson. To this end the imperialist b ocked with the most reactionary force imaginable. Women in the Taleban's Afghanistan have been forced to starve as it is illegal for them to earn an income. They have been deprived of a right to an education. US imperialism attack Muslim fundamentalism. But it is thanks :o America, the Taleban were in power in Afghanistan ann are still controlling much of the countryside.

Imperialism is not the way to defeat Muslim fundamentalism. On the contrary it is promoting it. As the Taleban have more ano more victories in Afghanistan the more the appear in the eyes of many in the Arab Middle East and Muslim wor d as liberators.

Defend Craig Johnston

Craig Johnston is a leading Victorian unionist. He is former state secretary of the Australian Manufacturing mon. AS a militant, part of the Skilled Six he faces serious charges concerning a picket outside hict if convicted of could result in a long term in risono fact the Bracks Government is out to get him, to set in example to show what happens to militant unionists. So is the AMWU leadership defending him? Of course iot! Very much the contrary! They lobbied the VTHC to ensure that they wouldn't come to his assistance. The Cameron leadership find him and his type of unionism an embarrassment. They want to crawl to the bosses and not fight them

The leadership have a clear political strategy. They want to pressure any future Labor governments to play a vanguard role in developing Australia.They want Labor to do this basically through protectionism as well as increasing government spending. By supporting Aussie bosses they hope to defend Australian manufacturing and Australian jobs. The AMWU leadership have drawn out the explicit reactionary logic of this — abandon militant unionism. Occasionally they put on a show to keep the membership happy. They also oppose bosses who are oppressive and especially those who don't want to talk to the union. But basically they reject offensive trade unionism. Instead they want to pressure a future Labor government to help the bosses.

Craig Johnston is a member of the oppositional faction within the AMWU called Workers First. He also is a member of Socialist Alliance.He, in general supports the potectionist programme to defend Australian manufacturing.But he has not taken it to the same reactionary logic as the Cameron leadership has. He still supports the principle ot trade unionism and it is for this that he is under attack. Craig Johnston should be defended uncon(Otionally irrespective of the merits of the charges or what we think of his tactics.

It is the responsibility of every union to do their utmost to keep Johnston out of jail. Resolutions should be passed. Every union Should be represented at pickets and rallies. Strike action Should be threatened unless all the charges are dropped Unions should send money to his defense fund

In calling unequivocally for his defence, in no way are we endorsing either his politics or the praxis of Workers First. His politics should be challenged with revolutionary communist politics. But he should be dealt with through political argument and workers democracy. We totally oppose the bureaucratic exclusionist methods of the Cameron leadership. There should be maximum democ—racy for the rank and file can debate strategy. In the seventies the AMWU held mass meetings to debate militant tactics to fight the boss. Today, both the tactics and the meetings are totally absent.

In 1969 unionists and workers came to the defence of Tramway Union leader Clarrie O'Shea, jailed for defying the penal powers. Although the powers remained technically on the books, the power of the workers made this reactionary legislation inoperable. A victory for Johnston would be a defeat for Bracks and his variant of penal powers. So by coming to the defence of Johnston, unionists could be saving not just Johnston but many other unionists from prison. It would be a big blow to the Bracks reactionary anti-union offensive,

In 1969 the unions which became the AMWU were wholehearted in their defence of O'Shea. Today they don't even give token support for Johnston in fact they support his imprisonment. This shows how far our unions have degenerated. It also shows how far Stalinists have degenerated. Let's stop the rot. Of course if the leadership don't act the rank and file should. Factory committees should organise independent of the official trade union structure if the bureaucrats refuse to lift a finger or worse still, condone his imprisonment

It is a matter of urgency that rank and file workers in the AMWU dump not just the politics but the politics which led to this total subservience to capitalism and the capitalist state.

Victoria: Bracks budget for the bosses. Vicious legislation against unions.

In Victoria, the bosses are over the moon. They have the budget they wanted from the "Labor" government. No Labor government in any state nor federally has received greater accolades than this. Bracks has introduced billion dollar cuts in land tax, an eight hundred dollar cuts to workcover premiums and draconian antiunion legislation. This legislation enables striking or locked out workers to be ordered back to work if it is dreamed that their actions threaten the public interest.

The business community is ecstatic. The Age quotes Neil Coulson Victorian Finance Chamber of Commerce 'The package will go a long way to serving business interests into the future. "The Liberals are a bit disoriented. They quibble about lack of specifics. But on the whole they support the general direction which basically, is theirs. Bracks has done everything possible to pander to the bosses. It appears to have worked.

The people disgruntled by all this are the trade union movement. Draconian and a sop to the business community is how acting VTHC leader John Boyd describes it. Indeed he's right! The unions also point out that such legislation is unnecessary. There has been a thirty percent reduction in strikes under Bracks as compared to the previous Liberal government. Given the attacks on working people this speaks volumes about the trade union movement. Bracks basically wants an insurance policy to guarantee the bosses that if things change, his government will be ready.

Communist Left stands for

Bracks fully acknowledges what class he is serving. There is simply no way that he will listen to unionist objections, even reasonable ones. No doubt there will be plenty of policy resolutions from branches. Bracks will treat these with contempt. This is especially true if unions despite all this maintain their Labor loyalty and remain affiliated. Bracks and cohorts would be expelled from a decent workers party. That is not on the agenda. Rank and file should ask the serious question of what they are doing paying dues to such a party. These are being used to attack the workers movement, not promote it.

Unions should disaffiliate from the Labor Party. Reforming such a reactionary party is simply a pipe dream. Of course disaffiliation is not the total answer. Many non-affiliated unions share reformist assumptions and sell out just as effectively. Disaffiliation is only the start. The next step is to draw out the conclusions on how a naive but well meaning group of reformists degenerated into such an antiunion reactionary cancer. Bracks is the logic of reformism. It is the logic of the failure of Cain's alternative capitalist economic fiddling, which didn't work. Basically if you can't beat them, join them is how Bracks figures things. The workers movement must organise to fight his reactionary legislation and bring down his government Now!