

Iraq: analysis must be our starting point

THE main problem with Dan Randall's article (*Solidarity* 3/144) is methodological. Dan says: our starting point is not, therefore, "who is currently the strongest force in Iraq?" or even "what would happen (or probably happen, or certainly happen) if the troops left?" Our starting point is "what will build the third camp?"

This is not our starting point. To develop a programme and a strategy to build the third camp, you have to start with an assessment of reality. Marx wrote that human beings make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. Lenin and Trotsky emphasised stating what is — starting from the realities of the situation today in order to develop a coherent working class politics. This is the materialist method, and is necessary if the working class is to make its own history.

Starting from reality is the basis for the AWL's politics on all questions. Yet the minority comrades have not produced a single,

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concrete assessment of the reality of the situation in Iraq. Such an analysis should be dynamic — it cannot confine itself simply to the current conjuncture or the existing balance

of forces. But before becoming is being. Dan's document simply fails to engage with the majority position because he offers no alternative assessment, from which his slogans might flow.

The second methodological problem is with arguments from analogy. Dan says our slogan of "Israel out of the occupied territories" is in contradiction with our politics in Iraq. His argument seems to be: "Israeli troops out of the occupied territories" means a probable Islamist state, at least in Gaza — so why don't we argue against Israel scuttling. This is odd, since Israel has been nominally "out" of Gaza since 2005 — whereas the occupation troops are most certainly "in" Iraq.

In the West Bank, where Israeli troops are most definitely "in", demanding their withdrawal would result in an independent Palestinian state, run essentially by Fatah. This would be self-determination, a democratic solution, giving space for Palestinian workers to organise. That's why it is a central agitational demand.

However in Iraq, the consequences of the troops scuttling would be the break up of Iraq, the opposite of self-determination and the crushing of the workers' movement in most areas. In other words, the analogy between Israel and Iraq simply doesn't hold.

The minority position is characterised by a lightmindedness towards political analysis coupled with the telescoping of future possibilities and current conditions. The comrades are impatient with the lack of progress made the Iraqi labour movement. The latter is understandable, but unfortunately it is combined with the invention of scenarios for quick-fixing the weakness of the Iraqi labour movement.

The minority seem to believe that for the working class to become the hegemonic force in Iraq, it needs to raise shrill slogans against the occupation. Dan writes:

"We do not believe that Iraqi labour can become a decisive force in the struggle against the occupation without raising sharp demands that express its intransigent hostility to the presence of the troops."

There are two problems with this approach. Firstly, it is a matter of fact that all sections of the Iraqi labour movement already use slogans against the occupation. For example the FWCUI organised a demonstration on the fourth anniversary of the invasion, with banners calling for troops out now (the pictures are on their website). It's difficult to know what more they could say or do on the issue. They appear to be following the minority's advice, and yet they have not rallied bigger forces around themselves.

Secondly, the more substantial problem is with the situation. The Iraqi labour movement is not on the offensive, going forward with its own demands and attracting unorganised workers and other strata to its cause. It is organisationally weak, fragmented and fighting for its life — for its survival, against the occupation forces, the Iraqi state and the sectarian militias. Putting forward slogans as if it were about to become the hegemonic force or take power is to imagine a scenario far from current conditions. It is to fantasise about different, more favourable circumstances — as a substitute for thinking about what to say and do today. It is the logic of scenario politics, not rational, Marxist politics.

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tion concretely. There are at least some common pointers as to how the Iraqi labour

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movement can grow.

The most important is probably the fight against oil privatisation. A victory on this front through militant strike action would help establish the labour movement as a significant force in Iraqi politics.

The fight for women's rights, for sexual freedom and against sectarian, religious-based politics are essential if the workers' movement is to become a unifying force. Workers' self-defence militias need to be developed.

Political representation, even in the dire, sectarian political system, would be a step forward. Workers don't have a voice — a paper, a mass political organisation that articulates their interests — even for basic services, health, education and security. A broad workers' party — even a reformist one or an amalgam of existing leftist groups — would be a step forward.

To adequately map out such a strategy requires a more concrete analysis of the Iraqi labour movement. It's a great shame that the minority comrades have not provided any ideas on this front either.

Paul Hampton, SW London

9/11: conspiracy cannot be dismissed

JOHN Moeller, in his article 'The "nine eleven truth" movement' (*Solidarity* 3/110) makes a number of good points. But he fails to recognise that because some proponents of a theory are crackpots one must not dismiss what others, with some evidence to support them, are saying. History is replete with examples of conspiracies of all kinds, economic and political. Of course, we don't need a 'secret plot' to explain alienation. But the link between fundamental economic exploitation and alienation is mediated by political events, some of which do involve conspiracies.

Moeller ignores the fact that in 2001 when the horror of 9/11 occurred the United States had lost the excuse which had enabled it to attack opponents of its policies at home and to keep its foreign "allies" on side: the bogey of communism and the Soviet "threat". 9/11, whoever caused it, was a convenient replacement, giving the President credibility for declaring his "War on Terrorism". Under this banner Britain and other countries could be enrolled as "allies" and all passed laws which greatly reduced their citizens' freedoms and human rights. It was also used as an excuse to make war and thus further encourage the very acts which it purports to stamp out.

One of the serious sites to examine what really happened on 9/11 is "9/11 Research" [<http://911research.wtc7.net/index.html>]. A disclaimer on the homepage states: "9/11 Research does not promote incivility, junk science, or "no-jetliner" claims". It further warns that "It is common to see links or references to 9-11 Research next to other sites promoting some of the most transparently nonsensical theories — such as 911Review.org, which features ad hominem attacks against Jim Hoffman." Contrary to such sites and the kind of people John Moeller seems to have encountered, 9/11 Research takes one through a detailed examination of the evidence, the misinformation which has been spread, and then makes an analysis of a vast quantity of data which this has uncovered. Carefully following all this, one cannot but question the official story.

I hope that it will be possible for you to correct the impression which John Moeller's article creates. It is important to understand the complex politics of the new imperialism if we are to defeat it and achieve the goals which John Moeller clearly stands for.

Ronald F. Price, by email

No support for Fatah

THE recent article by Sean Matgamna on the AWL website, "The only way to be for the Palestinians, or the Israelis, is to be for two states", and the editorial in

Solidarity 3/114, " Hamas victory is a tragedy for Palestine", were right to reject the left's predictable rallying behind the clerical fascist Hamas band in the aftermath of its war against Fatah. However, in both cases the comrades were too ready to give credit to bourgeois political forces which might defeat Hamas, rather than positing an independent working-class perspective uniting workers against the conflict being waged by the chauvinists on all sides.

I do not for one moment play down the reactionary nature of Hamas or pretend that its "anti-imperialist" credentials render its attacks on women, gay people and trade unionists acceptable, as the SWP et al might. But the fact that Hamas are bigoted should not mean we sow illusions in Fatah. Fatah is a simply bourgeois political party, drenched in anti-semitism and religious chauvinism. They are supported by the terrorist al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. Fatah is not "secular"; and, even if it were, as the editorial put it, "a secular, or more secular, or semi-secular force", that should not mean that we support it against Hamas — we are not in the business of popular fronts and support for bourgeois forces, secular or not, to solve geopolitical goals, but instead fight for an independent socialist alternative. Even if Fatah is "better" than Hamas, we cannot place any confidence in it to liberate Palestinian workers.

The article does not explicitly call for support for Fatah, using weasel words to avoid doing so; but the meaning of the phrases "Between [the clerical fascist] upsurge and the more secular Fatah, socialists cannot be neutral" or "we take no positive political responsibility for Fatah — but for sure we are not on the side of the clerical fascists" is clear. Yes, we are not "neutral" when democratic rights are under attack, and yes, there is a "right to resist tyranny: the right to fight it, subvert it, crush it" — but

the whole question is, whose right is this, and against whom should their fight take place! I do not place any trust or faith in "semi-secular" bourgeois to fight for human liberation, and cannot see how Palestinian workers could support Fatah without taking political responsibility for them.

Equally, in the case of "For the Palestinians", Sean posits that "To argue that Israel does not have the right to respond to the election of a Hamas government would be ridiculous". But to which Israelis does this right belong, and what powers are they allowed to use? I am a two-statist in that I believe that Israelis and Palestinians each have the right to self-determination under a democratic peace settlement, but this does not mean that I think that the current Israeli government and military set-up have "rights" to interfere with Palestinian political structures. Of course we are not indifferent to Hamas's victory, but what do Israeli-EU-USA economic sanctions on the Palestinian Authority achieve other than add to the misery of the Palestinian people?

Surely our means of fighting clerical fascism is not to invoke the so-called international community or line up with the "least worst" bourgeois forces at hand, but instead to rebuild a working-class alternative, in recognising that the growth of Islamism relied on the collapse of the secular left in the Middle East. That left was Stalinist and lacked a perspective whereby the working class fights as an independent force for political and economic power. However, the 27-28 July Ramallah conference of trade unions independent of Fatah and Hamas may help the construction of a different labour movement — and even if such forces are currently weak, we must not make the mistake of looking to geopolitical manoeuvres to save Palestine.

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