

do what the PDP/Army aspirant bureaucrats could not do — subjugate the population and make a Stalinist 'revolution'.

The first question to the hypocritical 'humanitarians' is, how many of the Afghans will the Russians shoot? The second question is, why is such a brutal transformation by conquest necessary? Why should it not be what the majority of the peoples of Afghanistan want that occurs? Why can't this area wait until the majority of its own population decides to fight for social change, or until a socialist revolution in the advanced world makes it possible to attract its people to the work of transforming their own country? From the point of view of the international socialist revolution, there is no reason why not.

Fundamentally, however, it is impossible to work out a serious independent working class political assessment on the basis of yes or no to such gun-to-head questions as: do you want the right-wing Muslim reactionaries to triumph? (In Militant's case, anyway, the question is an afterthought to dress up and explain a decision to support the logic of their theorising. When they, initially, opted to bend to 'working class opinion', it did not worry them at all).

In any situation where a large revolutionary working class movement does not exist, the gun-to-head appeal to responsibility, humanitarianism, and lesser evilism can almost always be counterposed to an independent working class political assessment. In 1969 when the British Army was deployed to stop sectarian

fighting in Derry and Belfast, enormous pressure was generated to support the use of the troops, or refrain from opposing their use, on the grounds that they had probably saved Catholic lives and that Catholics had welcomed them. A lot of socialists succumbed to the pressure. The IS (SWP) organisation did. The small minority at the September 1969 IS conference who resisted and called for opposition to the British imperialist troops were met with hysterical denunciation and slandered as 'fascists' who 'wanted a bloodbath'. Yet it was those Marxists who refused to be panicked or to abandon their understanding of Britain's role in Ireland who had the better grasp of reality.

But then, Ted Grant might say, it was plainly a matter of a reactionary imperialist army. *And in Afghanistan it is a matter of the thoroughly reactionary anti working class army of the Russian bureaucracy.*

If the Russians withdraw, it might well prove to be the case that the final result of the strange episode of the seizure of power by the putschist PDP/Army 'bureaucratic revolutionaries' would be a massacre of PDP supporters. That would be a tragedy. *But it cannot follow that because of this Marxist socialists should abandon their programmatic opposition to the expansion of the area under Kremlin control, or should abandon the idea that the consolidation of a Stalinist regime in Afghanistan would be a defeat for the Afghan working class.*

We cannot abandon independent working class politics for the lesser evil — for the PDP and the supporters of the Russians — in the situation which the putsch, the policy of the PDP/Army, and the

Russian invasion has created for them. We are not, to quote Trotsky, the inspectors-general of history.

Political independence

The political independence of the working class, and in the pioneering place the political independence of the Marxists, is the to-be-or-not-to-be question for socialism — independence from the bourgeoisie, from the labour bureaucracy, and from the totalitarian state bureaucracies of the Stalinist states. This is the immediate political question for people who take Militant's pro-Stalinist line on Afghanistan for Marxism.

While Militant is unlikely to influence events in Afghanistan, it does influence people in Britain (and perhaps elsewhere). *It influences them away from independent working class politics and towards the role of cheerleaders for the 'progressive Stalinists in Afghanistan,* where it supports a Stalinist transformation, abandoning the very commitment to working class political independence as well as the Trotskyist programme.

Militant insists that the proper role for socialist militants is to line up firmly with one of the international blocs. It deplors the lack of class consciousness and failure to relate properly to the 'major' contradiction of our time on the part of the British CP, because it does not support the invasion. Militant even criticises the Tribunites, as we saw, for not basing themselves on the actual relations between the great powers!

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† I summarised above what Trotsky's attitude to the expansion of the Stalinist state actually was in 1939-40. This is a much mythologised episode, and many 'Trotskyists' think Trotsky supported Stalin's expansion. (Walsh does, for example). Some think that Trotsky identified with the 'revolution' in eastern Poland. Nothing of the sort.

During the Stalinist occupation of Poland and invasion of Finland in 1939-40, Trotsky argued that revolutionaries must recognise that the Russian Army was likely to stimulate revolutionary struggle which the Stalinists would use against the Polish and Finnish ruling class — and then strangle. Revolutionaries should support any such independent working class and poor peasant mobilisation, and align themselves with it. They should at the same time try to warn the workers and peasants against the Stalinist Russian state and all its instruments, as deadly enemies. They should immediately fight for political independence from the Stalinists... and prepare to fight them with guns.

It was a policy for the orientation of revolutionaries in a situation where (Trotsky assumed) the 'Red' Army had still a revolutionary prestige and authority with the oppressed 'Polish' Ukrainians, and others, where its call to seize land, etc., could be expected to evoke responses of a revolutionary sort. Nothing like that can be even imagined in Afghanistan now. The Russians have alienated even former supporters of the PDP.

And, as far as I know, Trotsky's assumptions about Eastern Poland and Finland were seriously mistaken. (He was starved of concrete information). Even in 1939 the 'Red' Army's power to rouse revolutionary action was minimal; its power to kill off Poles was much greater. Between one million and 1.5 m. Poles alone were deported to

ed to make Poland safe for Stalinism. (The Poles numbered 5 million out of 13 million in Eastern Poland, the rest being Ukrainians and White Russians).

Trotsky partly acknowledged his miscalculation (see 'In Defence of Marxism'). And in any case, as we saw above, he did not hesitate to describe the fate of the people of East Poland, in so far as they were subjugated by the 'Red' Army, as that of 'the semi-slaves of Stalin'.

Where is the analogy with what Militant is supporting in Afghanistan? Militant is supporting the implied 'promise' of nationalisations and agrarian reform to be carried out by a totalitarian state which has imposed itself by force, against the resistance of the people of Afghanistan. **Where Militant parts company with Marxists is clear at this point: they do not relate to the working class and its struggles and its interests [the struggle against repression, the struggle to secure the basis for its own free organisation — the sorts of issues Marxists would relate to if they assumed, in an open, rational and demystified way, that a revolution was occurring but not a proletarian revolution].**

The Stalinist 'revolution' will impose a savagely oppressive regime, which will destroy and continually uproot any elements of a labour movement. To go from the clear and simple idea of 'defencism' — that the conquest of the Stalinist states by imperialism and their return to capitalism would be reactionary and should be opposed by socialists — to support for the conquest and hoped-for transformation of Afghanistan is to travel light-years away from revolutionary socialism. It is to take up residence on the grounds of Stalinism; to accommodate to the existing Stalinist bureaucracy with the 'perspective' (i.e., passive hope) that after the totalitarian 'stage' will come a better stage.