

Workers' Liberty

<http://www.workersliberty.org>

What we need to build out of the anti-war movement

Solidarity with Iraqi workers

Who will win the peace? We do not know how long a US military government of Iraq will last, or how repressive it will be. We do not know how soon the USA's "hawks" will take this as a green light for new wars.

We do know one thing. Much of the outcome still depends on the strength and coherence of the international protest movement, which must now shift from being just an "anti-war" movement into one of solidarity with the peoples of Iraq.

The USA's hawks have won a military victory. They could still suffer a political defeat. That depends on the independent self-organisation of the peoples of Iraq, and especially the workers of Iraq, on our ability to assist and encourage them, and on the pressure we can exert on the Western governments. If we prove strong enough we can prevent them holding a garrison in Iraq. We can force them to cede to an authentic democratic revolution in Iraq which will not sing along to the White House song-sheet. We can make it politically impossible for the USA to launch new "pre-emptive" wars.

The Kurds are a distinct nation. They want freedom. They need our solidarity against demands they make for increased – or even continued – autonomy being suppressed by an alliance of the USA and Turkey.

"You'll see the celebrations and we will be happy Saddam has gone. But we will then want to rid ourselves of the Americans and we will want to keep our oil and there will be resistance and they will call us 'terrorists'...". The Baghdadi who said that, quoted by Robert Fisk in the *Independent* of 10 April, summed it up well.

The ex-Ba'athists, and the Islamic fundamentalists, have a "lead", and material advantages, over the workers' movement being reborn in Iraq when it comes to organising now, in the new chaos. Our

Marxism 2003 • the fringe

Iraq: workers' solidarity or just "anti-imperialism"?

Speakers: Clive Bradley (Workers' Liberty) and Nadia Mahmood (Worker-communist Party of Iraq)

7.30pm Tuesday 8 July, at the Exmouth Arms, Starcross Street, near Euston.

main job as socialists should be to redress that balance of advantage, by aiding the new Iraqi workers' movement.

"Victory to Iraq" was wrong

It is good that Saddam's totalitarian regime has been broken. It is bad that it was done by the US/UK invaders, in their own way, pursuing their own interests.

Out of the anti-war movement we should now build a movement in solidarity with the working people of Iraq, upholding the democratic rights of the peoples of Iraq and, especially, the struggles and the rights to organise of the workers of Iraq.

To do that, we must first recognise that most of the ideologues in our anti-war

movement got the war wrong.

They said "victory to the resistance"; or "victory to Iraq"; or "victory to the people of Iraq; defeat US/UK". Or they applauded efforts by "Iraq's beleaguered government...to appeal over the heads of the reactionary Arab rulers...[for] support for Iraq". Or they just condemned the brutality of the invasion while being quiet about Saddam's regime and the position of the Kurds.

In one way or another, they presented Saddam Hussein as fighting a national liberation war against the US and UK, one that should be supported even though they rejected Saddam's politics (as they did). They now stand convicted of supporting an abstraction – "Iraq", or "the resistance" – as against the actual people

of Iraq.

Would it be good if Saddam should now somehow regroup unexpectedly strong forces and drive out the US and UK, reconquering Baghdad, Basra, and Kirkuk, repeating what he did after he suppressed the uprising of 1991? It would not.

"No to war, no to Saddam" – support for the "third camp" of workers and oppressed peoples against both warring powers – was the right approach. By siding with Saddam in the war, the ideologues fell down on their internationalist duty to the peoples of Iraq, discredited themselves with any thinking person, and wrong-footed themselves for the tasks of solidarity with the peoples of Iraq now facing us.

Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a regional-imperialist state. It represented the rule of a section of the Sunni Muslim Arabs of the central areas over the Shi'ites of the South and the Kurds of the north. It sought to grab other areas: Kuwait (1990), territory from Iran (1980-8). It sought to dominate the Gulf. By 2002 it was a very weakened, shattered imperialism. The weakness explains why US hyper-imperialism felt so confident about going to war, and why victory for Saddam was always improbable. It did not make victory for Saddam desirable.

For an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel!

The USA has published a "roadmap" for Israel/Palestine, but Ariel Sharon is clear that any "Palestinian state" he accepts will be a Bantustan, a long way down the road.

The anti-war movement should feed into renewed mobilisation round the simple, clear demand that Israel get out of the occupied territories now and let the Pales-

tinians form a state of their own with the same rights as Israel.

The basic answer is a democratic, socialist federation of the whole region, enabling the massive oil riches to be used for the common good rather than to enrich monarchies and despots, with the right to self-determination for every nationality, including the Palestinians, the Israeli Jews, and the Kurds.

Unfortunately the ideologues of the anti-war movement have wrongfooted themselves here, too, by adopting the add-on slogan "Freedom for Palestine" in order to facilitate a "popular-front" alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain (British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest, oldest and richest Islamic-fundamentalist party in the Arab world). "Freedom"? Isn't that vague enough for almost anyone to support? Yes, but the Brotherhood means by it an Islamic state from the Jordan to the sea, where Jews would have no national rights but only those of a religious minority.

In coming years, if the Iraqi workers' movement revives, one of its main foes within Iraqi politics may well be Islamic fundamentalism. To help that movement effectively, we will need to understand what has been wrong about the anti-war movement's alliance with fundamentalism.

The United Nations

A lot of diplomatic agitation now will be around how much role the United Nations has in Iraq, or whether the USA will freeze the UN out.

The Iraqi people will need massive aid to reconstruct their country now, and it is reasonable that they demand it both from the United Nations which imposed sanctions on them, and the USA.

It would be wrong for anti-war activists to get ourselves drawn into fighting the corner of France, Russia and Germany (all with their own records of crimes) against the USA.

The UN is not a democratic world government. It is a diplomatic thieves' kitchen. The peoples of Iraq should decide their future – not the USA, and not the UN.

The Iraqi working class

For decades the Iraqi working class has been suppressed and denied a voice. From within the Ba'athist state we have not been able to hear even the reports of sporadic and persecuted strikes and demonstrations which are audible from, say, Iran, or were audible from the USSR in its later years.

But the Iraqi working class also has great traditions. In the brief period between the 1958 coup, which opened up mass politics in Iraq, and the 1963 coup which first brought the Ba'athists to power, the Communist Party was by far Iraq's strongest party.

It was not a revolutionary party, but one which gave "critical support" to a military government because the USSR thought that the best thing for its foreign policy. Nevertheless, it organised trade unions. Tens of thousands of workers joined it because they thought it was "communist" in the sense of wanting working-class self-liberation.

We cannot know what legacy and memories remain. But Iraq certainly has a large working class. Even now, the looting in Baghdad has a dimension of class struggle by the mostly-Shi'ite workers and poor against the Ba'athist elite. Iraq has the raw materials for a powerful workers' movement, which could be leader in organising a democratic accommodation between the different communities in Iraq, and which could upset all the USA's plans.

Solidarity with the Iraqi workers' movement – in the first place, with the right to organise trade unions and political parties – should be a priority.

Solidarity with the peoples of Iraq!
Democracy in Iraq, freedom for the Kurds!
No US/UK occupation!
Support Iraqi workers!

Web links

Workers' Liberty:

<http://www.workersliberty.org>
More from Workers' Liberty on the war:

www.workersliberty.org/war
Worker-communist Party of Iraq:
<http://www.wpiraq.org/english/>

No Sweat:

<http://www.nosweat.org.uk>
Students Against the War:
www.studentstopwar.org.uk
Labour Against The War:
www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk

Stop The War:

<http://www.stopwar.org.uk>

Workers' Liberty 2/3: The new world disorder

Includes: The USA as hyperpower + Iraq: trajectory of a state + Capitalism, nation, classes, Empire + Two critiques: 'Empire' and 'new imperialism' + Hamas and nationalism + Ultra-imperialism + Socialism and colonial policy + ABC of national liberation movements + Dossier on socialists and war: Kosova 1999, Kuwait 1991, South Atlantic 1982. 200 pages. £3.50 (£2 unwaged) post free from AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.