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Socialist Voice #23, November 3, 2004

'We Call Upon You to Stop This Massacre'

By Kassim Abdullsattar al-Jumaily

Editor's Note: *The following statement from citizens of Fallujah was written as the U.S. military continued its bombardment of the city, preparatory to what they warn will be an all-out assault on the Iraqi city. It was originally published in [Socialist Worker](#).*

This powerful appeal underlines the need for renewed actions for immediate withdrawal of all occupation troops and for the right of Iraqis to self-determination. Representatives of antiwar organizations from across Canada will be meeting in the Toronto conference of the [Canadian Peace Alliance](#) November 5-7 to plan future actions. They deserve our energetic support. — Roger Annis and John Riddell

An appeal from Fallujah to Kofi Annan and the UN

It is more than evident that U.S. forces are committing daily acts of genocide in Iraq. As we write, these crimes are being perpetrated against the city of Fallujah. U.S. war planes are launching their most powerful bombs against the civilian population, killing and wounding hundreds of innocent people. Their tanks are pounding the city with heavy artillery.

As you know, there is no military presence in the city. There have been no actions by the resistance in Fallujah in the last few weeks because negotiations are in progress between representatives of the city and the Allawi government.

The new bombardment by the U.S. has begun while the people are fasting during the celebration of Ramadan. Now many of them are trapped in the ruins of their homes and cut off from any outside assistance.

On the night of 13 October, a single U.S. bombardment destroyed 50 houses and their inhabitants. Is this a crime of genocide or a lesson about U.S. democracy? The U.S. is committing acts of terror against the people of Fallujah for only one reason—to force them to accept the occupation.

Your excellency and the whole world know that the U.S. and their allies have destroyed our country on the pretext of the threat of weapons of mass destruction. Now, after their own mass destruction and the killing of thousands of civilians, they have admitted that they have not found any.

But they have said nothing about the crimes they have committed. The whole world is silent, and even the killing of Iraqi civilians is not condemned. Will the U.S. be paying compensation, as it made Iraq do after the 1991 Gulf War?

We know that we live in a world of double standards. In Fallujah the U.S. has created a new and shadowy target—Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi is a new excuse to justify the U.S.'s criminal actions. A year has passed since this new excuse was dreamed up, and every time they attack homes, mosques, and restaurants, killing women and children, they say, "We have launched a successful operation against al-Zarqawi."

They will never say they have killed him, because he does not exist.

The people of Fallujah assure you that this person is not in the city, nor probably anywhere else in Iraq. Many times the people of Fallujah have asked that if anyone sees al-Zarqawi they should kill him. We know now that he is nothing but a phantom created by the U.S.

Our representatives have repeatedly denounced kidnapping and killing of civilians. We have nothing to do with any group that acts in an inhumane manner.

We call on you and the leaders of the world to exert the greatest pressure on the Bush administration to end its crimes against Fallujah and pull its army back from the city. When they left a while ago, the city had peace and tranquillity. There was no disorder in the city. The civil administration here functioned well, despite the lack of resources.

Our "offence" is simply that we did not welcome the forces of occupation. This is our right according to UN Charter, according to international law and according to the norms of humanity.

It is very urgent that you, along with other world leaders, intervene immediately to prevent another massacre.

We have tried to contact UN representatives in Iraq to ask them to do this but, as you know, they are sealed off in the maximum security Green Zone in Baghdad, and we are not allowed access to them.

We want the UN to take a stand on the situation in Fallujah.

Best wishes, in the name of the people of Fallujah, the shura council of Fallujah, the trade union association, the teachers' union, and the council of tribal leaders.

Kassim Abdulsattar al-Jumaily, president of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights and Democracy, Fallujah

Socialist Voice #24, November 8, 2004

Bush's Election Has Decided Nothing

By Fred Feldman

Nothing has been decided by the U.S. presidential election, except the choice of the dominant wing of the U.S. ruling class.

The imperialists are neither nearer nor farther from their goal of suppressing Iraq. The Cuban revolution is neither nearer or farther from being overthrown. The Venezuelan revolution is still advancing, not retreating. Gay rights are neither nearer or farther from being decisively victorious or defeat. The economy remains parlous, the recovery weak and partially counteracted, and international competition fierce.

An assault on social security and other attacks on working people are sure to gain momentum, but this is due to the low level of resistance from labor, the oppressed nationalities, and women, not to the outcome of the vote count. The crisis of orientation of the Bush administration is neither nearer nor further from being resolved.

What Are Elections For?

The purpose of elections in imperialist democracy is to manufacture consent, reinforce and preserve backwardness, and undermine self-confidence and independence of the oppressed and exploited in their own power to make change. And these elections have done their job.

Bush has a mandate to rule, but it comes not from the voters but from the ruling class. It expects him to show more finesse in dealing with the competition and resistance Washington faces abroad, while continuing the ruthless attacks on our living standards and democratic rights.

For the next fairly brief period, the rulers and their media will unite to sell us the New Popular Bush who cannot be defied. But Bush has yet to decisively win any battle where he has faced real mass resistance.

Nor, of course, have the imperialists yet been decisively defeated in any such battle. Now the Iraqis will be told, "See, you must bow to the occupation for Super-Bush cannot be defeated." The Iranians will be told that they cannot defend their sovereignty. The Venezuelans will be told to drop any idea of taking the land. The Cubans are being told, "You *will* suffer more without end."

Why Kerry Lost

We should remember how imperialist-democratic politics work. The defeat of Kerry did not occur he supported the war or failed to speak to the concerns of workers. Kerry's prowar, antiworker stand was what made him acceptable to the bourgeoisie as a possible alternative. And given the problems that Bush has run into internationally, plus oil prices and the favorable competitive position that the Euro has won against the dollar, that alternative seemed attractive to many of the rulers. But in the end, they feared the results of changing the president—which might have made sections of the masses feel stronger and more confident—more than the

consequences of Bush's inadequacies, which they can deal with in other ways if this proves necessary.

But if Kerry had in fact talked against the war or used a lot of populist pro-worker demagoguery, the bourgeoisie would have sunk him without a trace, just as they sunk George McGovern's campaign in 1972. The elections did not provide a referendum on the war, because the bourgeoisie do not allow these matters to be decided that way. There was no vote for the war by the masses, because imperialist democracy provides them no say on that matter whatsoever.

We have to fight every trace of the idea that the function of the working people in politics is to provide voting cattle for the liberals and deny this to the conservatives. We must oppose fulmination against white workers (or others) who voted for the Republicans rather than the Democrats. We must reject the idea that workers who vote Republican "vote against their interests" while workers who vote Democratic "do not." That concept is the way to keep running in the mouse cage of imperialist democracy.

Given the absence today of working-class struggle, or its very low level, most workers retreat. They turn inward to their families and communities. Yes, they can fear change. Religion—never absent, I might add, under capitalist (that is, pre-communist) conditions—gets stronger.

Impact of Inpouring Profits

In addition, the United States and the working class is tremendously affected and partly shaped by the inpouring of profits from the colonial world that shape the society and affect all layers of all classes. These profits shape the racist stratification of peoples and are the reason why the imperialist two-party system has been able to maintain its monopoly position for the last hundred years. It is a myth that these benefits touch only white workers or only the labor aristocracy, and even more of a myth that they touch only those who vote Republican.

The United States is a *privileged nation* in the world, as a consequence of its substantial and ongoing world hegemony. Empty moralizing and fulmination about the white workers as the sole recipients of privilege is incorrect, worthless politically, and ultimately reactionary. And limiting this denunciation to those who vote Republican—the others are OK—is electoralism carried to the absurd.

The benefits of imperialist domination do affect the whites, including workers, disproportionately. But all classes of all nationalities are affected, not just workers, and not just workers of the dominant nationality. After all, the reason why all the immigrants come here is to be in the places that imperialist superprofits go rather than the places from which they are taken. They need a piece of that action, and many of them—like the rest of us—do get some.

If you want to reach out only to those who are not affected to some degree by the vast wealth pouring in, you have to live in the countries from which the wealth is coming. Imperialist superprofits—along with the class struggles we have waged—is the reason why we have been able to make any progress at all in winning, through struggle, any safety net from the imperialist rulers, as compared to the situation in Indonesia or the Philippines or central Africa.

Workers of all nationalities do carry out progressive anti-imperialist struggles today, such as the fight to organize unions. The importance of unions lies not in their small or large numbers but in the desperate need of the working class for these basic organizations that confront the employer on the job. Nationalist organizations, revolutionary organizations, youth organizations, academic societies, and so on cannot do this job. The unions are small today. That just means that in any general rise of struggle today, unions—whether the ones we have now or new ones arising out of struggle—will grow tremendously.

The answer to this election and its outcome does not lie in winning more votes for the next Kerry or in a civil war to crush the atavistic “red states.” The answer lies in more class struggle by workers farmers, students, Blacks, Chicanos, immigrants against exploitation, repression, discrimination, and war.

Gay Marriage Debate

The fight for gay rights has proven to be a significant and long-term component of this process. It is extremely important not to exaggerate the setback to gay rights represented by the victory of anti-gay marriage referenda in 11 states. The idea of gay marriage exploded into the consciousness of tens of millions of people this year for the first time in their lives and in U.S. history—and, for that matter, the history of the modern world.

Given the newness and apparent strangeness of the idea for those encountering it for the first time, plus the continuing depth of prejudices of all kinds maintained by class society, it was a foregone conclusion that the reactionary referenda would be successful this year. It was an easy victory for the Republicans, and a handy assist toward the primary goal of helping re-elect Bush. Supporters of gay rights countered with protests, educational campaigns, court actions, and highly visible actions such as the defiant and proud weddings in San Francisco.

Of course, the top Democratic candidates gave no support to this fight. Clinton and others are now insisting that the Democratic Party must become more antigay, more anti-abortion, more antilabor, and more prowar to regain the “heartland”—that is, to win the heart of the billionaire families who have preferred the Republicans to the Democrats in six of the last nine elections.

While gays have been victimized by the constitutional amendment operation, people are now being made aware in an unprecedented way of a new and important question of equality, non-discrimination, and democratic rights. The referenda are not a decisive setback for the gay movement, but the beginning of a fight that has a positive future, especially if other class battles at home and abroad grow stronger in the coming years. From the standpoint of working people, the fight for gay marriage was vastly more important than which of their enemies won this election.

Basis for an Alternative

Imperialism, reaction, and backwardness won the election. This is hardly surprising. The U.S. political system is the ideal one for imperialism, and in this setup, only imperialism, reaction, and backwardness can win such contests.

The people who voted for Nader are not *the* base of a future mass party of the oppressed and exploited in this country—any more than those who voted for Bush are the mass base of fascism. Some of the Nader supporters may be won to activism on behalf of working people. But the major benefit of the Nader campaign was not that it forged the base of a new mass party but as propaganda against the two-party imperialist trap.

It is the mass of the oppressed and exploited themselves who provide the basis for a real alternative, which will arise not primarily out of polemics against people who vote for the capitalist parties, but out of massive class struggles.

Socialist Voice #25, November 14, 2004

Canadian Bolsheviks: The Importance of Canadian Popular History

By Dale McCartney

Editors' note—Canadian Bolsheviks, *Ian Angus's pathbreaking classic on the early years of the Communist Party, is back in print! Join in celebrating its re-publication of Canadian Bolsheviks at book launches in Vancouver and Toronto:*

Vancouver: *Wednesday November 17, 7:30 pm, Little Mountain Learning Center, Main St., at 24th Ave. Speakers: Ian Angus, Cynthia Flood, Joey Hartman, Mark Leier, Dale McCartney. Sponsors: International Socialists, LeftTurn.ca, New Socialist Group, Rebuilding the Left, Seven Oaks Magazine, Socialist Voice*

Toronto: *Thursday November 25, 7:30 pm, Portuguese Canadian Democratic Association Hall, 860-B College St. Speakers: Ian Angus, Carolyn Egan, Sam Gindin, Bryan Palmer, John Riddell. Sponsors: International Socialists, Marxist Institute, New Socialist Group, Socialist Action, Socialist Alternative, Socialist Project, Socialist Voice*

For more information, go to the Socialist History website.

To introduce Canadian Bolsheviks to a new generation of readers, we republish an appreciation of this book by the Vancouver online weekly, Seven Oaks (<http://www.sevenoaksmag.com/>). Reproduced with permission of Seven Oaks. —Roger Annis and John Riddell

The field of popular history abounds with bad books. For every Zinn's *People's History of the United States* there are a hundred Pierre Berton celebrations of white people on Canada's frontiers. When it comes to Canadian history especially, quality books are few and far between. The more narrow the category, the more rare the quality book. For the left in Canada, there are only a handful of quality histories widely available and written in an engaging style. Thankfully, this month the reissue of *Canadian Bolsheviks*, by Ian Angus, makes the list one title longer.

Angus's book was originally published in 1981, and has been out of print for several years. This month, however, the book is being reissued, making Angus's path-breaking study widely available once again. The book is an exploration of the earliest years of the Communist Party of Canada, written for both an academic and a popular audience. Angus writes of the party's roots in the Canadian Socialist tradition, and chronicles its formation as well as its first decade.

Throughout he debunks myths and assesses victories and defeats for the party, illuminating a period in the history of the Canadian left that has received little treatment. When the book was first published, it filled an enormous gap in Canadian historiography, discussing a period and a group of people who had received far less attention than their place in Canadian history deserved.

As Angus is quick to point out, as well, the other works on the early party had been written by leaders of the party many years after the events. Angus carefully analyzes their memories, and finds many of them lacking. Tim Buck, the leader of the party throughout the Stalinist period and the primary source (before the publication of *Canadian Bolsheviks*) for its history, comes under particularly intense scrutiny. Angus illustrates how carefully constructed much of Buck's history of the period was, and in the process demonstrates that his role has been considerably overestimated in the period before 1924.

On Wednesday, November 17, *Seven Oaks* is co-hosting an evening with Angus, launching the new release of the book and discussing the role of the Communist Party of Canada in its early years. Angus's book fits well with our broader cultural mission. His approach to history, both in his interest in the history of resistance and in his accessible style, are traits we here at *Seven Oaks* hope to emulate in our own writing. We feel strongly that works like *Canadian Bolsheviks* contribute to a cultural discussion both within traditional wings of the left, as well as outside of those groups, that is absolutely necessary in this country.

An increasingly corporate media, coupled with a school system that largely ignores working class history, means that books like Angus's and a vibrant discussion about them is more important today than ever. For that reason, we hope that our readers will join us next Wednesday night, at the Little Mountain Learning Centre in Vancouver (3957 Main Street, or Main and 24th Avenue) at 7:30pm. The event is not only an excellent chance to meet and talk with Angus, as well as other leaders in the study of working class history, but it is also an opportunity for a community discussion of the issues this history raises. We hope to see you there.

For more information on Canadian Bolsheviks or its author, Ian Angus, visit
www.socialisthistory.ca

Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada, published 2004 by The Socialist History Project, in association with Trafford Publishing.

Socialist Voice #26, November 23, 2004

Recollections of the Late 1950s: How Marxists in the Unions Reached Out to Student Radicals

By John Riddell

Editors' Note: Marxists have always held that the industrial working class—workers in manufacturing, transportation, extractive, and communication industries that sustain the capitalist profit machine—has decisive strategic weight in the struggle for socialism. Most socialist tendencies in Canada, at one time or another, have carried out efforts to root their forces in the industrial working class and industrial unions.

As a contribution to understanding what can be achieved through such efforts, John Riddell recalls here the impact of his first encounter with the Canadian Trotskyists. This brief memoir was written as part of the preparations for "Against the Stream," a history of Canadian Trotskyism from 1928 to 1961 that John is now preparing in collaboration with Ian Angus.

One day during the Ontario provincial election campaign of 1959, I took the streetcar after high school to Toronto's Cabbagetown to canvass my poll for the CCF (Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, predecessor of the NDP). Cabbagetown was then a poor working-class district, where the CCF faced an uphill struggle; it was running Tom MacAuley, head of the Steelworkers local in United Steel Wares, the major factory in that part of town.

During my canvass, I ran into Joe Rosenblatt, whom I had met several times before at antinuclear events, where he was selling the Trotskyist newspaper, the Workers Vanguard. He offered to help me canvass, so we'd have time to talk over coffee afterwards.

Joe and I were worlds apart: he, a self-educated worker in his twenties—employed at USW along with a number of other Vanguard supporters—and I an over-confident high-schooler with no experience in the workers' movement or a working-class milieu. I wanted to learn more about Joe's world, and I found out that he already knew a great deal about mine.

Joe supported the anti-nuclear movement, in which I was active, and like me he strongly backed its radical wing, which favored unilateral disarmament by the NATO powers. But he had no patience with my philosophical pacifism, and startled me by arguing that the only way to "ban the bomb" was to disarm our capitalist rulers.

Joe was also active, like me, in the efforts to merge the CCF into a new party—which was in 1961 to give birth the NDP. He described how he and his comrades were working to make the New Party a real labor party, not a coalition of liberal-minded individuals, and to endow it with a socialist program. He urged me to join with the Vanguard comrades in building a left wing of the New Party movement.

Trotskyists in the Unions

I soon found that Joe's group, the Socialist Educational League (SEL), was made up of about 15 comrades—mostly factory workers, active in their unions and in the New Party movement. (In those days, public-sector unionism was almost non-existent.)

The SEL had been formed after the Trotskyists' expulsion in the early 1950s from the CCF. After those expulsions, the socialist left in the CCF was very weak. But SEL members were active in the unions' Political Action Committees, which had been set up to support the CCF. A couple of the SELers were delegates to the Toronto Labor Council. Many of them had been recruited from the factory milieu; others had gone to work there because that was the natural arena for revolutionaries. They sold me James P. Cannon's *Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, which explained all that very well. Among the comrades from that time still active are George Bryant, Ernie Tate, and Alan Harris (now in Britain).

The SEL also put out a monthly newspaper, maintained a bookstore, ran the yearly campaigns of its leader Ross Dowson for the Toronto mayoralty (vigorous efforts, with door-to-door distribution of up to 40,000 leaflets), sent yearly "Trailblazing Tours" doing door-to-door work and visiting socialists in workers' neighborhoods across Canada, maintained a full-time bookstore, and held a weekly public forum.

Revolutionary Regroupment

The SEL was then the only activist group to the left of the Stalinist CP. A few years earlier, in the mid-1950s, the SEL had been quite isolated politically. Its members worked energetically to link up with other forces. Demonized by the Stalinists, feared and excluded by the CCF brass, and hounded by McCarthy-era anti-Communism, they sought allies where they could, and even worked with the Quakers for a time. "At one point, they were the only people who would talk to us," one veteran recently told me.

That had changed after the Khrushchev denunciation of Stalin and the Hungarian revolution of 1956. The Canadian Stalinist movement had fractured, and the SEL had been able to open up discussions with the dissident CPers. The SEL organized a broad public meeting together with leading ex-CPers, and then printed up the transcript in a widely circulated 5¢ pamphlet. Ross Dowson became secretary of the Toronto Committee to Free Morton Sobell (a victim of the U.S. McCarthyite witchhunt)—the first time Trotskyists had been accepted into a committee that also included the CP. The SEL held a well-attended and prestigious forum on Revolution and Literature, addressed by ex-CPer Annette Rubenstein.

The most promising element in the ex-CP milieu was the Québécois group led by Henri Gagnon. The relationship was helped along by the SEL's sensitivity to the Quebec national question, dating from the anti-conscription fight 15 years earlier. In 1958, two leading comrades of the SEL moved to Montreal to work with the Gagnon forces.

In the United States, the SEL's cothinkers of the Socialist Workers Party took part in a similar regroupment effort that culminated in 1958 in a united-front electoral ticket in New York State. The joint ticket included SWPers alongside prominent ex-members of the CP. In Vancouver, the Canadian Trotskyists recruited CP founder Malcolm Bruce and other prominent party members. Efforts in Montreal were unsuccessful, however, and in Toronto most of the ex-CP forces headed

out of politics. But by the time I met Joe Rosenblatt, new openings emerged: the New Party movement and the challenge of defending the Cuban Revolution.

The New Party and the Cuban Revolution

The year 1959 was not a time of militant struggles by the working class in the Toronto area. But these two issues—labor's effort to build a new political party, and the inspiration of the Cuban revolution—gripped the imagination of many working people. SEL members campaigned in their workplaces with some success to build the new party and defend Cuba. Indeed, they scored a minor breakthrough among Toronto's Teamsters, recruiting about a dozen of them in 1961-62.

The SEL was active on many other issues. It conducted active education for women's rights, supported the Black freedom struggle in the U.S., and struggles for colonial liberation in Algeria and Vietnam. It also collaborated with Milton Acorn, Al Purdy, and other socialist poets—a story worth telling separately. (Joe Rosenblatt, I soon learned, was himself a poet, and was soon to make his reputation in this arena.)

Winning Over Radical Students

But it was among youth that the SEL, known from 1961 as the League for Socialist Action (LSA), made its breakthrough. This was surprising, given that most student radicals (and they were still only a small handful) were then quite hostile to Marxism. SEL/LSA members spent a lot of time seeking contacts among student radicals, at first with little success. The student peace movement was decidedly pacifist, counting on persuasion and moral witness to bring about negotiated disarmament. It refused to defend Cuba against U.S. attacks. Socialist groups were absent from the campuses, and the student NDP was conventional in politics. The LSA's call to make the New Party a genuine labor party was strange and alien to most student radicals.

But in talking to radical students about the working class, the LSA had a very convincing argument. LSA comrades were themselves of the working class, and spoke of its struggles with authority. The LSA's wealth of practical experience in the labor movement was immensely attractive. The LSA was a foretaste of the revolutionary working-class movement many of the young radicals aspired to build. The LSA's orientation to build its forces in industrial unions turned out to be an ideal base from which to link up with revolutionary-minded students and to win significant members of that new generation to revolutionary socialism.