

## CWI on imperialist wars

Fri, 02/02/2007 - 09:57

The armed struggle against the massive oppression of the US occupation has now gone on for two years. Without any doubt, the struggle has been spearheaded by the Iraqi petty-bourgeoisie and capitalist class, in the form of a large number of resistance groups. What signifies these groups? Firstly, their division, how they're unable to unite the struggle or at least reach any long-term co-operation on a national level. Secondly, their inability to massively incorporate the Iraqi working class in the struggle. Thirdly, and this follows from the first two hallmarks, the form of the struggle - an elitist guerrilla war with considerable lack of mass actions, but nevertheless supported by the masses.

In sharp contrast to this is the enormous fighting spirit of the Iraqi masses and their unselfish self-sacrifice in face of the world's largest and most well-organised military apparatus, this despite imperialist terror on a scale never seen before.

Thus, we can establish that neither the Iraqi capitalist class nor the petty-bourgeoisie have managed to organise a resistance on national level or give it any political content during the last two years, despite favourable atmosphere amongst the masses. There're several good reasons to why this is the case, something we don't need to investigate closer here; we'll settle with saying that the capitalists and the petty-bourgeoisie tried, and failed. This fact strongly points to that the working class is the only class in Iraq able to organise and lead the resistance in an efficient and successful way.

But the working class of Iraq has yet to awaken politically, and it hasn't organised to struggle. First and foremost it lacks a revolutionary, Marxist party. Without such a party, the struggle will remain in the hands of the weak Iraqi capitalists for as long the occupation remains.

Luckily, the world is a highly interconnected system under the current imperialist epoch. The struggle of the working class of Iraq is heavily relying on the workers' struggle in other parts of the world, and vice versa. This fact opens a possibility for the antiwar and anti-capitalist movement to aid the Iraqi working class also through a struggle that might be centred in the imperialist heartlands.

The old antiwar movement is organically unable to complete that task. How could it be otherwise when it consists of organisations that in many cases deny the Iraqis the right to self defence, or in their politics directly attacks workers' interests (like the Left party in Sweden)? A new antiwar movement, prepared to deal with this task, is therefore utterly important in the fight against imperialism. The criticism of the left and the question of Iraq that we now put forward should be seen in this context, and as an attempt to direct the path of the movement from start.

Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (RS, "Justice Party the Socialists", the Swedish CWI section) is, besides Arbetarmakt ("Workers Power", L5I) and Socialistiska Partiet ("Socialist Party", USFI) one of three organisations in Sweden who base their politics in Trotskyism. We will now have a closer look at their policies regarding the Iraqi resistance. In *Offensiv* [RS weekly] #641, from March 17, 2005, the article "Iraq and the resistance against occupation" says the following:

"Is the support of the resistance unconditional?"

-No, we cannot support all actions. For example, we'll never forget the Vietnamese Stalinists' assaults on the once strong Trotskyists there. As internationalists, we claim the right to have our say on the methods of struggle. The Iraqi resistance is made up of many groups, and, naturally, we oppose abuse which complicates a maximum mobilisation of forces from Iraqi workers and common people over ethnic and religious boundaries. Attacks against visitors to a Shia Muslim mosque, which recently killed over 100 civilians during the Day of Ashura, are a shocking example of this."

What does this mean? It is said that the support is not unconditional, that is, that RS has set up certain conditions for whether to support different resistance groups in the anti-imperialist struggle or not. This is a sad tactic, resulting in that the current resistance can be divided into two groups: a 'good' and an 'undesirable' resistance. We can also mention that other articles by RS in *Offensiv* refuse to both critical and uncritical support to the resistance. When we say the resistance, we're referring to the different Iraqi groups fighting the US occupation, and not single actions or armed struggle in general. Quoting from *Offensiv* #596, from April 28, 2004:

"First, let's make clear that we consistently defend the right of the Iraqis to pursue an armed struggle against the occupation forces and their lackeys. Like the Norwegians during WWII and the Algerians against the French colonial power, all people in a country invaded and oppressed by an imperialist power have that right - something that even the United Nations law of nations admits. This does not mean that we defend all kinds of resistance, especially not if it is aimed at civilians or carried out with means and methods that undermine the popular support.

Just as we didn't cry 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh' during the Vietnam War or supported the Milosevic camp, even though we opposed the so called Kosovo war, we don't give any blind support to the resistance groups that operate in Iraq.

The widening Iraqi resistance also encompasses groups that socialists in Iraq have good reasons to feel threatened by, like members of the former Baath Party dictatorship, Islamist extreme right-wing around Shia Muslim Muqtada al-Sadr, or even a fanatical minority al-Qaeda supporters."

Hence, the Iraqis do have the right to carry out an armed resistance, but that does not at all mean that RS supports the current Iraqi resistance. The part about 'blind support' to resistance groups is a vague statement, since one is not told what kind of support RS are prepared to offer instead. Another example is that a collection of RS' opinions on Iraq, published on the front page of *Offensiv* #590 from March 18, 2004, does not contain any single opinion regarding the resistance.

But let's look at the article from *Offensiv* #641 again. There, it's also made clear that the condition is that the resistance shouldn't carry out actions that complicate a maximum mobilisation of the Iraqi masses, i.e. which leads the masses away from the path of struggle. One example of such actions is individual terrorist attacks. Afterwards, a number of groups we suspect are risking to lose RS' support are listed:

"No way forward

Even though everything points at their influence being exaggerated by the USA, there can be no doubt about the participation [in the resistance] of reactionary groups originating in Saddam Hussein's Baath party and right-wing religious fanatics in the area. At least some of these have connections to the Jordan Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the extreme Kurdish Islamist group Ansar al-Sunna."

The opinion is shared by the Syndicalist Andreas Malm, about whom *Offensiv*, in the same article, writes

the following:

"As Andreas Malm points out and criticises in issue 9/2005 of Syndicalist magazine *Arbetaren*, a faction of the antiwar movement originating from the Maoist solidarity work with NLF during the Vietnam war is trying to build for a new Iraq movement focused on an unconditional support of the Iraqi resistance. This will lead nowhere."

So, what's the problem with RS and Malm's tactic of putting conditions on the resistance? Firstly, why should only the small fundamentalist groups such as the al-Zarqawi group, the Wahhabis or reactionary groups from the original Baath party be condemned? They don't divert the masses from the struggle more than most other Islamist or nationalist groups. On the contrary, the larger Islamist and nationalist groups have a far worse influence on the masses, since they obviously cannot co-ordinate the struggle on a national level nor convince the working class to whole-heartedly join the struggle. They're also steering Iraq on the path to civil war, since they're divided on religious lines. This they do with ten or twenty times more strength and efficiency as their influence on the masses is twenty times larger than that of the fundamentalists. So why should those groups be supported? The logic of RS ought to exclude also them from the 'good' resistance.

And what about the Worker-communist Party of Iraq (WCPI)? They too mislead the working class and the masses by their open sectarianism towards the Iraqi resistance (an opinion shared also by RS). They call for communists to fight both the occupation and the resistance, and therefore drive the masses right into the arms of Iraqi Islamists, or into a civil war. Is their bad influence less than that of, for example, the Wahhabis? Hardly so. They should also, with the RS logic, be excluded from the 'good' resistance.

So of all of the resistance, only the fighting Iraqi revolutionary Trotskyists remain, with the objection that these don't exist.

It is now clearer that the tactic of conditional support cannot be applied without one rapidly ending up with in WCPI's position regarding the resistance. (How do RS think that WCPI came up with their position anyways?)

But perhaps we misunderstood what conditional support means for RS. However, that this is not the case is proven by how RS mentions and commends Malm's article without as much as a word of criticism. In the aforementioned article from *Arbetaren*, Malm develops his position as meaning that one should deny parts of the resistance support. There's one other thing that suggests we're right. In *Offensiv #638* from February 24, 2005, a report from the Scottish Socialist Party conference, where Scottish CWI supporters participated, can be found. The report, entitled "Successes for CWI at the SSP conference", is very telling, and therefore we'll quote at length from it:

"SSP and Iraq

The SSP conference began with a debate on Iraq. A motion to the conference, inspired by the Socialist Worker platform, called for uncritical support to the 'Iraqi popular resistance.' The only amendment to challenge this was put forward by CWI members.

Our amendment called for the removal of all occupying troops and for support for mass resistance to the occupation, through the building of workers' and farmers' militias that seek to unite all the different ethnic and religions groups in Iraq.

It also called on the SSP to refuse to give support to the reactionary and anti-working class forces that make up part of the resistance in Iraq. Sinead Daly from Dundee West argued that: 'We cannot as

socialists give our support to those forces in Iraq whose ideas and methods are anti-working class, anti-women and who, in some cases, are intent on trying to provoke a civil and sectarian war in Iraq. We should support a movement to unite the working class and the poor based on a struggle for a living wage, healthcare, education, and basic services, as well as opposition to the imperialist occupation of their country.? This amendment was opposed by a long succession of Socialist Workers Party (SWP) members

### **Overwhelming majority**

However, our amendment was passed overwhelmingly. The press and media ran a number of items prior to the conference highlighting the fact that the SSP was going to debate a motion that would ?support beheadings in Iraq and the killing of British troops.? The main item on the BBC Scottish news on Saturday night was that a motion giving uncritical support to all of the resistance in Iraq had been defeated.

Without doubt the CWI?s amendment went a long way to saving the SSP from a storm of media and political attacks had the SWP motion been passed unamended. None of the leaders of the SSP intervened in this debate, despite the fact that the consequences for the SSP could have been severe. This underlines the principled approach that the CWI has always taken to the SSP, arguing for ideas that would strengthen the SSP and opposing ideas that would weaken or damage it.?

The lack of criticism in this report tells us that RS shares the position of its Scottish sister organisation. As we?ve already showed, the tactic of conditional support to the resistance, splitting it in one acceptable and one undesirable part, does lead to open sectarianism. The second part of the text is also interesting, and just as telling when it comes to the opportunism of RS and CWI when it comes to recruiting new members. Every single bit of Marxism has to be toned down in order to ingratiate oneself with the misled working class.

And what?s the problem with the working class hearing through the mass media that SSP is for the killing of British soldiers? If one supports armed resistance in Iraq, as CWI does, one should know that this means exactly the victory of the military struggle of the Iraqi's over the British army, so much so that the British military power is broken down, its troop morale destroyed, and that it thus is of no use to the British imperialists (of course, the antiwar movement has just as much responsibility in achieving this, as does the struggle to bring the troops home, the only serious way of 'supporting' the soldiers). Once again, it?s worth mentioning that support of the armed struggle is something entirely different than support of the Iraqi resistance. WCPI also claim to support armed struggle, but against the Iraqi resistance. If CWI really supports the armed struggle, what they said above means that they?re hoodwinking the Scottish workers.

As if this wasn?t enough, CWI also saved Scottish Socialist Party from a storm of media and political attacks! What a farce, what a kowtow to the capitalist press, to the worst deceivers and professional misleaders of the working class!

What tactic, what position should revolutionary Marxists have regarding the Iraqi resistance? Should we, like the Stalinists, uncritically support the resistance? In order to answer that question, one must ask for who the tactic regarding the resistance is of practical importance. Firstly, the question is of importance to communists in Iraq, and secondly, to the antiwar movement. The question is important to the Iraqi communists for them to be able to choose the correct tactics to win the masses, i.e., win them for proletarian revolution. For the antiwar movement, the question is important for the same reasons, i.e, in relation to the Iraqi masses. In other words, the question of how we relate to the resistance is not about an individual, moral statement for our own sake. The task of communists in Iraq and the rest of the world is a very practical one indeed, that of ending the influence of the Islamists/nationalists over the masses.

RS argument for putting conditions on the support to the resistance is that some resistance groups carry out actions that'd complicate a maximum mobilisation of forces, but they fail to realise that it's in the nature of the present resistance to complicate such a mobilisation. Otherwise, we would've had mass insurrection to end the occupation already a long time ago.

There are three possible paths to fight the occupation. The first one argued for by RS, is that the communists, in order to win the leadership of the struggle, would chose to condemn part or all of the Iraqi resistance. Raising this line in a situation where the heroic fight against the occupation carried out by the Islamist resistance is visible to everyone would equal political suicide in relation to the masses. In the eyes of the masses, this position means siding with the occupation.

The second option is to give uncritical support to the resistance, as done by Stalinists. Such a position would leave the Iraqi communists in a situation where political leadership is left to Islamists and nationalists; that is, leaving control and leadership to bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces. In the mean time it'd mean subordinating under a bourgeois leadership. Such a struggle will fail.

Now, it is obvious that the only possible option for communists is to critically support all of the Iraqi resistance. On one hand, this means supporting all resistance groups in their struggle as long as they fight the occupation, and on the other hand to criticise the policies and actions of the same groups. Our support isn't blind, we don't agree with individual terror against civilians or the division of the resistance on religious or ethnic lines. On the contrary, that is exactly what we have to criticise.

Neither the individual terrorism of the small, fundamentalist groups or the reactionary politics of the Wahhabis is the decisive problem in Iraq. However, they're symptoms of the failure of the Iraqi capitalists and petty-bourgeoisie to organise and take leadership of the struggle. And in that lies the decisive problem: Proclaiming the need for the workers to organise and a socialist way forward while in the mean time refusing to support the resistance won't take us one inch closer any solution.

Marxists mustn't anxiously follow every temporary change of mood in the masses when it comes to establishing a principled position. This also applies when it comes to the question of individual terrorism. Giving in to the masses' fear of individual terrorism, a hysteria fuelled by the bourgeois media, would be pure opportunism. We're not saying Marxists should ignore the atmosphere among the masses, but they can only have importance when it comes to choosing what tactics to apply. For Marxists, positions of principle are exclusively decided through scientific facts.

Conditional support to the resistance means firstly that RS, in the same way as Malm did on the founding meeting of IrakSolidaritet [individual membership based solidarity organisation supporting the resistance] in Stockholm, takes a sectarian stance towards the new antiwar movement. They simply boycott it politically. But a conditional support to the resistance does not only mean sectarianism towards the resistance and the antiwar movement, but also opportunism towards the masses in Sweden. It makes recruitment to the party easier, since it makes RS' policies more acceptable to the common man.

The fact that the new antiwar movement in Sweden is dominated by Stalinists does not mean that Marxists can neglect their duty to take part in the movement and try to steer it on to the correct course. The new antiwar movement is a fact. It didn't materialise because someone had an idea, but from the historical need of a movement that can solve the problems facing the working class regarding Iraq and the fight against imperialism. The old movement cannot do this, which it has proven during the events of the past two years. We hope that also RS will come to realise this soon, and join the struggle to steer the new movement on to the correct course. There's still a good chance of doing so. Otherwise, the new

movement will be lost to the Stalinists, just as the Vietnam movement was in the 1960s.

---

**Source URL:** <https://fifthinternational.org/content/cwi-imperialist-wars>