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The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend

Burn Shit

April 8, 2014

The hypocrisies of hierarchical political organisations know no bounds. Of this we can be certain. However, we shouldn't be cajoled into thinking that the political right have a monopoly on contradiction and duplicity. As far as it plays the game of modern power politics, the inconsistencies and follies of The Left rival those of any rightist grouping. The modern-day disciples of the dead men with beards are by no means immune to the worst effects of dogmatism and myopia.

The beloved movement – or what exists of a movement – is in constant search of a totem: a real, tangible example of anti-imperialist practice, of 'actually existing socialism' or an ever-illusivive alternative to capitalist hegemony. In its quest for a 'model pupil', a *raison d'être*, a rallying cry, it finds itself siding with crypto-fascist demagogues and equally thuggish 'resistance movements'. Large sections of today's 'progressives' are blinded by the old assumption that my enemy's enemy is my friend.

What were once the (nominally) cherished principles of the old Left have faded, only to be replaced by a single doctrine

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of anti-imperialism/anti-Zionism. Race and gender equality, radical democracy, individual liberty, egalitarianism and even class politics have been abandoned and subsumed by a unitary oppositional creed: All is now sacrificed in a distorted united front against US foreign policy.

Nowhere is this clearer in the statist left's response to the civil war in Syria. Some have found a new hero in Bashar al-Assad and his Ba'athist regime. Others have weighed in on the side of 'The Rebels' as if they were some united bloc representative of the Syrian people, rather than a hodgepodge of jihadist militants, Army defectors and some (it appears increasingly few) well-intentioned Syrians opposed to the authoritarianism of the Assad family. The Left's response to such crises is as confused as ever. They favour black and white pledges of 'solidarity' – too often an empty word with no practical action attached – over a nuanced response to complex problems. They'll back anything or anyone superficially opposed to US interests.

There's always been a tendency to romanticise armed revolutionaries and bearded guerrilla fighters, but the macho fantasising reaches its nadir at anti-Israeli demonstrations when SWP activists begin to chant 'We are all Hezbollah!' The Party of God's virulent anti-Semitism, misogyny, opposition to free speech, workers' rights and personal freedoms is of no consequence, nor a religious fanaticism that puts the Republican right to shame; what matters is their opposition to the Evil Empire. This is not to argue for the essential benevolence of American foreign policy, quite the opposite, but to question a simplistic mind-set that is typical of many radicals, who instinctively support anything that the US opposes.

Some of the nuttier sects on the Stalinist left even hold public meetings that shower praise on Kim Jong-Un's DPRK and still bemoan the fall of the workers' gulag that was the USSR. Still more laud the Chinese Communist Party in their glorious road to socialism via sweatshops. They are stuck in a realpolit-

ical farce in which they'll lend their ear (and, of course, their 'solidarity') to any despot who whispers anti-Americanism as a virtue. They'll forgo looking at the concrete policies or practices of an organisation and send out their fraternal greetings to militant cabals and dictatorial strong-men, as long as they are considered to be working against the interests of American capitalism.

These militants want their worldview represented in some officially-recognised geographical entity. They crave to find a place where their theoretical Utopias are practically realised in order that they can point to the shining path of some crackpot dictator, print their faces on T-shirts and say, 'this is the way, truth and the light' – a bulwark against the Great Satan of imperialism and monopoly capital. It serves as a rallying point for desperate souls who see socialism in the flags of nation states and central committee communiques.

Anarchists eulogise the lived examples of libertarian communism in Barcelona, the Commune of 1871, Makhno's Ukraine and the workers' uprisings of times past. However, unlike the authoritarian left, we have never had our totemic symbol, our rallying cry, our USSR, our enemy's enemy, our nation-state. Instead we have the lived experiences of millions throughout history. Mutual aid, co-operation, common ownership and control, not as represented by a spectacular icon – a Castro, Mao or a kafiyeh-clad guerrilla – but lived directly without mediation and without being recuperated by crooks draped in socialist red. We need to understand the true nature of struggle, of workers realising their own power through struggle, not be caught in the star-gazing spectacle of lefty idolatry. But the left is on the back foot. They are still in retreat. The defeats of recent decades have left some yearning to see their aspirations reified in The Other. But in their desperation, in their withdrawal from the class struggle towards a facile position of America-bashing they have finished chasing chimeras as servants of morally bankrupt demagogues.