

Stalinism and the Spartacist League

An exchange on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

28 July 1998

Again, if the Spartacist League was wrong in supporting Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, what were the real world alternatives for revolutionaries in Kabul?

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23 July

We have a fundamentally different starting point in approaching the problems and crisis facing the working class and the oppressed masses all over the world. You ask, 'what possible real world alternative existed for the progressives and revolutionaries in Kabul' to support for the Red Army in Afghanistan. It is not a matter of choosing what you term a 'real world alternative,' which boils down to workers aligning themselves with their most deadly enemies. It is a matter of finding a way to fight for the political independence of the working class, and building a genuine socialist alternative based on internationalism.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a reactionary adventure from the outset, and was one of the most crucial factors in laying the basis for the emergence and growth of the Islamic fundamentalists who have now fastened their grip on most of the country. The Soviet bureaucracy established a hated puppet regime in Kabul, from which the masses were alienated from the beginning. They proceeded to install various regimes in succession, in some cases killing off their own previous stooges as the political and military situation deteriorated through the 1980s. How could support for Stalinism possibly represent any alternative to the fundamentalists under these circumstances? On the contrary, it was the crimes of Stalinism that were helping to strengthen fundamentalism.

Your talk of a 'real world alternative' suggests a deep pessimism about the possibility of building a leadership

for the working class. We cannot agree with this. It is necessary to work, under illegal conditions when required, to develop such a revolutionary leadership.

Without such a leadership working people will be condemned to defeat after defeat.

The approach of the Spartacist League is to make a formal equation between the Soviet Union, the product of a mighty revolution and bitter civil war, and a puppet state set up the counterrevolutionary Soviet bureaucracy decades later. The Trotskyist movement defended the USSR against imperialism, despite the crimes of Stalinism. But we defended the Soviet Union by revolutionary means. And we never associated ourselves one iota with Stalinist foreign policy in Europe, Southeast Asia, Afghanistan or anywhere else.

Defense of the USSR as a degenerated workers state was a tactic, subordinated to the strategy of the world socialist revolution, which includes the fight to overthrow the bureaucracy. There were occasions, as in Vietnam, when Soviet military support was doled out to a genuine mass movement in an effort to control this movement and use it as a bargaining chip in Moscow's negotiations with Washington. There were other occasions, as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where the Kremlin intervened directly to crush the working class. The case of Afghanistan was similar to these latter examples of puppet Stalinist regimes deserving of no support against their own population.

The Spartacist League is a middle class group whose political trajectory has taken it from Trotskyism to pro-Stalinism, because it has written off the possibility of a genuine revolutionary perspective. It is precisely because it sees Stalinism and other bureaucratic agencies such as the trade union bureaucracy as the only 'real world alternative' to capitalism.

Sincerely,

Fred Mazelis

For the Socialist Equality Party

See Also:

Globalization and the International Working Class

A Marxist Assessment

[An elaboration of political perspective and revolutionary strategy

in the form of a polemic against the political positions of the Spartacist League]



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