

An exchange on "Pacifist moralizers rally behind the US war drive"

23 October 2001

The following is a letter on David Walsh's October 19 article, "Pacifist moralizers rally behind the US war drive," and a reply by the author.

In his article of October 19 ("Pacifist moralizers rally behind the US war drive"), David Walsh writes: "Socialists condemn the September 11 attack not because it is 'evil' in some abstract moral sense, but because it is politically reactionary. It is detrimental to the development of a unified and politically conscious struggle of the international working class."

Are we to infer from this comment that, should a socialist organization such as yours determine that such an act could somehow further the development of unified, politically conscious class struggle, you would then support it?

JH

19 October 2001

Dear Mr. H,

It would be an act of political dishonesty, deliberate or otherwise, to make such an inference. We have made clear our attitude toward the September 11 attack in dozens of articles and comments, beginning in the days immediately following the attack. Our hostility to the suicide-hijacking is of a principled character, because we are not motivated, as are the American media and Bush administration, by the desire to exploit this tragedy for political and economic gain. To repeat: to explain is not to condone.

Our condemnation of the September 11 attack is not tactical. Under no circumstances could such an atrocity advance a progressive social struggle. The extreme right-wing politics of those who carried out the terror attack were summed up in the act: the killing of thousands of innocent men and women.

Bourgeois moralists always attack Marxists for their supposed "amoralism." Trotsky dissected this standpoint years ago in "Their Morals & Ours." He

commented: "The ruling class forces its ends upon society and habituates it into considering all those means which contradict its ends as immoral. That is the chief function of official morality." He noted further: "A means can be justified only by its end. But the end in its turn needs to be justified."

In the present events, neither the terrorists' ends nor their means are justified. The end of those carrying out the attacks is presumably to alter US foreign policy in their favor. In the final analysis, bin Laden and his type are bourgeois nationalists, who have no more interest in the fate of the Arab or Afghan masses than does Washington. They want to rule in the Middle East, or to have a larger say in affairs, at the expense of those currently in power. Their ends are politically reactionary and, thus, so are their means.

We believe any means are justified that, in Trotsky's words, "really lead to the liberation of mankind." The murder of 6,000 civilians is a reprehensible act that brands its perpetrators as enemies of the liberation of mankind. The claims that such forces may have made of their legitimate "anti-imperialist" credentials have been exposed by this crime.

That means and ends are linked is not simply true in this case. The claim that the US was fighting for "freedom and democracy" in World War II was exposed by, among other acts, its dropping of atomic bombs on the centers of two heavily populated Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945. As historian Gabriel Jackson has noted, in *Civilization and Barbarity*, "In this way, the United States—for anyone concerned with moral distinctions in the conduct of different types of government—blurred the distinction between fascism and democracy."

Sincerely,

David Walsh

22 October 2001



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