

Washington Post columnist Michael Kelly red-baits the Workers World Party

David Walsh
24 January 2003

The witch-hunting attack by columnist Michael Kelly on the Workers World Party in the *Washington Post* (“Marching with Stalinists,” January 22, 2003) was entirely predictable. One right-wing hack or another was bound to get around to the task.

Kelly, perpetually outraged and perpetually ignorant, takes the occasion of last week’s massive demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco against the imminent war on Iraq to denounce one of the protests’ principal organizers, ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), as “a front group for the communist Workers World Party.”

The columnist goes on to identify Workers World with the Chinese and North Korean regimes, Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, “the mullahs of Iran, and the narco-gangsters of Colombia and the bus-bombers of Hamas.” The principal device employed here, one long favored by witch-hunters, is the amalgam: throw everything together in the hope of creating the maximum fear and disorientation.

Reflected in this vicious attack on Workers World is a great deal of nervousness within the media and political elite about the mass opposition that has emerged to war against Iraq, revealed in the recent demonstrations and underscored by opinion polls. Kelly senses the isolation of the political establishment and the growth of popular discontent over the Bush administration’s war-mongering abroad and its assault on democratic rights and working class living standards at home. Reflecting the intellectual and political degeneracy of his milieu, he lashes out, resorting to the time-tested refuge of the distinctly American scoundrel: red-baiting.

When a Marxist uses the term Stalinism it has a specific meaning. It refers to the theory and practice of the national-opportunist bureaucracy that emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and usurped political power from the workers and peasants who carried out the 1917

October Revolution. In the final analysis, this bureaucracy—which played a counterrevolutionary role internationally—reflected the pressure of world imperialism on the isolated and economically deprived workers’ state. Its strangling of the fledgling Soviet democracy expressed a degeneration whose culmination was the dismantling of the historic conquests of the October Revolution and the restoration of capitalism.

To establish its power fully, the Stalinist caste carried out a blood purge in the 1930s, exterminating the generation of socialists that had led the revolution, first and foremost the Marxists who took their lead from Leon Trotsky.

The *World Socialist Web Site* criticizes Workers World for its orientation to the trade union bureaucracy and sections of the Democratic Party in the US, and to bureaucratic and bourgeois nationalist regimes internationally. Our differences are deep and principled and involve essential issues in the development of a revolutionary strategy for the American and international working class.

There is a time and place to elaborate and explain these differences. With Kelly and his ilk, however, we are dealing with political scoundrels in the service of reaction. In opposition to Kelly’s red-baiting, our attitude is unconditional and unequivocal defense of the Workers World Party.

In his article Kelly raises September 11, 2001 as a turning point in the history of civilization. “In al Qaeda and in the Taliban and in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, liberal civilization faced an enemy that represented nearly every evil that liberalism has ever stood against. What was the left going to do? A pretty straightforward call, you might say. America has its flaws. But war involves choosing sides, and the American side—which was, after all, the side of liberalism, of progressivism, of democracy, of freedom, of not chucking gays off rooftops and not stoning

adulterers and not whipping women in the town square, and not gassing minority populations and not torturing advocates of free speech—was surely preferable to the side of the ‘Islamofascists,’ to borrow a word from the essayist and former man of the left, Christopher Hitchens.”

More amalgams and more lies. By a crude sleight of hand Kelly identifies al Qaeda and the Taliban with the Iraqi Ba’athist regime. The WSWS gives no political support to this bourgeois nationalist regime. But no one has produced any credible evidence linking it to the September 11 attacks. That which has been offered has been exposed as fraudulent.

If Islamic fundamentalism represents “nearly every evil that liberalism has ever stood against,” then perhaps Kelly can explain why it was the policy of both Democratic and Republican administrations for much of the past century, and especially from the late 1970s, to foment, finance and arm these reactionary forces, including Osama bin Laden and his cohorts, for the purpose of opposing secular nationalist forces in the Middle East and destabilizing the Soviet Union.

As for Hussein, no less an authority than the aforementioned “former man of the left” and now the far right, Hitchens, has acknowledged that “The United States had at least a hand in the coup that brought Saddam to power. It encouraged him in his attack on Iran. At the very time of his worst conduct in Kurdistan, Washington was his best friend. When he plotted to straighten the Kuwaiti frontier in his favour, he was given the greenest of lights.”

The US provided the Iraqi regime with the ingredients for its biological weapons program and looked on approvingly when Hussein used chemical weapons against Iranian forces and minority populations in the late 1980s.

Absent from Kelly’s litany is the one word that goes to the heart of the US drive to conquer and dominate Iraq—oil. To mention it would point to the fact that the coming invasion is a war of imperialist plunder, against a historically oppressed former colony.

“Liberalism,” “progressivism,” “democracy,” “freedom”—the invasion of Afghanistan embodied these noble principles? Who is kidding whom? Leaving aside the inconvenient fact that conditions in Afghanistan today are as wretched as they were under the Taliban—essentially one set of warlords has replaced another—and that the Saudi regime, which practices a form of Islamic fundamentalism as reactionary as the

Taliban’s, has been kept afloat by the US for decades, there is the matter of American imperialism’s record around the globe.

Washington has been the principal pillar of support for police-state regimes and their hired torturers and murderers for decades, from the CIA-backed governments in South Korea and Taiwan to the monstrous Shah of Iran, to the “death squads” of Central America and the military butchers in Chile and Argentina.

It is the US government and military that introduced “napalm” and “Agent Orange” and “We had to destroy the village to save it” into the modern lexicon, in a war in Southeast Asia that cost some three million lives.

Not satisfied with the destruction caused by the 1991 Gulf War and the death of 500,000 or more children as the result of economic sanctions, Washington now proposes another war against a defenseless Iraq, which will produce untold further misery. The predatory policies of American imperialism—this is the reality behind Kelly’s “democracy” and “progressivism.”

The columnist’s smears against the “left” are an attack on all those who express differences with the policies of the US government and an instinctive response to the threat of a new popular radicalization. They are an attempt to intimidate and silence all dissent. Kelly’s method is similar to that used by racists in the South during the Civil Rights movement: blame all opposition on “outside agitators.”

Kelly is one of many journalistic thugs in the service of the American plutocracy. There are dozens of them—the Krauthammers, Coulters, Sowell, Wills, etc., secreted out of the pores of an elite increasingly insulated from the general population and hostile to democratic rights. Their vocation, for which they are handsomely paid, is pumping out lies and filth on a daily basis. They are incapable of principled or reasoned discussion. There is no dialogue with them. They stand on the opposite side of the political barricades.



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