

An exchange on Sudan's Darfur conflict

11 September 2004

Dear Chris [Talbot]:

Your response to a *World Socialist Web Site* reader's inquiries into what the reader views as your insufficient statement on the crisis in Sudan is quite overwhelming. [See "An exchange on the crisis in Sudan's western Darfur region"]

Indeed, the reader's outrage against the crisis has clouded his vision. No doubt if the imperialist American government intervened in the crisis, overthrowing the Sudanese government, it would ensure on behalf of the various corporations it represents that civil strife would remain in the region long enough to guarantee the complete future plundering of the resources of Sudan.

Whether or not what is happening in Darfur constitutes a "genocide" is quite beneath the WSWS in that it is nit-picking, as is your line-by-line analysis of the reader's letter. The reader simply wishes to know if and when the WSWS condones military action.

Would the WSWS ever condone a transparent peacekeeping force? Why or why not?

While it is naturally correct to say that the international working class must rise up and take over, if you will, it is nevertheless insufficient, as the people of Darfur are being slaughtered while we wave our flag of the working class. Please include in your response to these difficult questions specifically what actions the WSWS wishes its devotees to employ in the expression of our common outrage of the situation in Darfur.

CG

Dear CG,

My reply and the previous articles on Sudan made it perfectly clear that we are against western military intervention, whether under the auspices of individual governments, the United Nations or the Africa Union.

Your conception of a "transparent" peace force is pure fiction and creates confusion. There is no possibility of a peace force that is not supported and funded by the western powers. A UN force could only

be cobbled together out of backroom deals between the United States, Britain, France, Germany, etc.—the countries that politically and financially dominate the UN. The African Union or any other collection of developing nations cannot act, and never have acted, independently of western support.

I referred to some of the cases in recent years of western military interventions. From your comments on American imperialism, I presume you are opposed to the criminal imperialist invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans. But why should "peacekeeping" forces, assembled and backed by the west, be essentially different?

Are you aware of the results of peacekeeping interventions in Africa? Even in a case like Sierra Leone, where immediate attacks on civilians by warlords was halted by the British army, the conflict in the region as a whole has worsened and the appalling conditions of poverty and unemployment facing the population continue.

The US/UN intervention in Somalia was a disaster that heralded more than a decade of civil war that is continuing. The West African (ECOMOG) intervention in Liberia led to unpaid Nigerian and other troops becoming another faction in the conflict, killing and looting the population along with the other warlords. The UN force in Rwanda retreated from the massacre in 1994 because there was no agreement at the UN between the French (who were supporting the government forces carrying out the massacre) and the US (who were backing the RPF rebels). In Ethiopia and Eritrea, the peacekeepers only arrived after both sides were exhausted with the senseless conflict that killed hundreds of thousands of troops. One could continue.

You refer to a US intervention in Sudan working on behalf of corporations and plundering resources but apparently consider that "peacekeeping" interventions are somehow different. This is nonsense. Apart from imposing IMF/World Bank privatisation programmes

and enforcing huge debt repayments to the banks, peacekeeping interventions are also concerned with furthering the interests of corporations and plundering resources. For example, in the case of East Timor, rich oil deposits have gone to Australian companies, whilst in Sierra Leone, diamond and titanium mining is being sold off to western corporations.

To repeat: There are no “transparent” peacekeeping forces independent of imperialism, and the WSWS does not support any peacekeeping interventions.

Your argument that it is “insufficient” to say that the “international working class must rise up and take over” while the people of Darfur are slaughtered is cynical and bankrupt. It should be obvious to anyone seriously reading our site that your reference to our waving the “flag of the working class” is an attempt to deride a principled struggle to build a political movement in the working class internationally, in which the clarification of a socialist perspective after years of confusion created by Stalinism and its radical hangers-on is the major question.

The argument that people are dying, so to “express our common outrage” something must be done, even if it means holding our noses and supporting an imperialist-backed military force, is crass opportunism. “Common outrage” is hardly the basis for sound political judgement, and this type of “must do something” argument is the stock-in-trade of every trade union bureaucrat, bourgeois nationalist and radical demagogue. It always turns into supporting a “lesser of two evils” version of imperialist politics—as was the case in the Balkans and Iraq when a swathe of the ostensibly “liberal” and social democratic “left” lined up behind Bush and Blair. And the same argument is advanced for endorsing Kerry and the pro-war Democrats (as opposed to Bush) in the US presidential elections. It does nothing to advance the interests of working class people. In fact, after experiencing the effect of such opportunist politics, it only encourages disillusionment.

The disastrous situation in Darfur is only a small part of the catastrophe that increasingly faces people throughout Africa and, for that matter, throughout the globe. It happens to have attracted immediate media attention. But over the last decade, millions have died in wars in the Congo, Sudan, Somalia and so on in situations that can all be put down to the legacy of

colonialism and western domination. That is why we are engaged in the struggle to build a socialist alternative. We are not in the business of offering the short-term solution of “peacekeeping” to this catastrophe—especially “solutions” that turn out to benefit imperialism.

Finally, on the question of “genocide.” To assert that to address this claim seriously is beneath us and “nit-picking” is ridiculous. Is it of no concern to our readers that western governments and politicians are using a pliant and supportive media to once again manipulate public opinion? This has, after all, happened over and over again with the use of hyperbole to massively exaggerate the actions of despotic regimes whilst diverting attention away from the far larger-scale criminal activities of the US administration and the other western governments. Is it not the case that the NATO bombing of Belgrade followed a barrage of press reports that said hundreds of thousands of Albanians in Kosovo were being killed in an “ethnic genocide”? And wasn’t the Iraq war justified as a legitimate campaign to oust a regime that had committed acts of “genocide” against its own people? Not to answer a reader’s letter in some detail exposing this type of propaganda would simply mean not taking our task seriously.

Yours sincerely,
Chris Talbot



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