

# Nation magazine, ISO silent on Boston lockdown

Tom Mackaman, Barry Grey  
30 April 2013

The *Nation* magazine and the International Socialist Organization's SocialistWorker.org web site have responded with indifference to the police-military lockdown of Boston imposed during the manhunt for the suspects in the April 15 Boston Marathon bombings.

The action, carried out with the backing of the Obama administration and in conjunction with state and local authorities, was tantamount to the imposition of a state of siege on a major American city. There is no precedent for the mobilization of thousands of National Guard troops, riot police, SWAT teams, machine-gun mounted armored vehicles, military helicopters and attack dogs that was employed to close down Boston and a number of suburbs, with residents told to "shelter in place" while armed officers carried out warrantless house-to-house searches.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its April 22 statement, American democracy in shambles, "The events in Boston have laid bare the modus operandi for the establishment of dictatorial forms of rule in the US. One or another violent act carried out by disoriented or disaffected individuals, perhaps with the help of elements within the state, is declared a terrorist event. A state of siege is imposed suspending democratic rights and establishment military-police control.

"So deeply implicated are all of the organs of the state in these plans that little in the outer trappings of political life would have to be changed."

No less indicative of the collapse of American democracy than the events themselves is the virtual absence of any criticism of the police state mobilization from any section of the political or media establishment. In this, as in the prosecution of imperialist wars in Libya and Syria and the relentless assault on the living conditions of the working class, the supposedly "left" elements around and within the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy that form the constituency of the *Nation* and the ISO take their cue from the ruling class.

One searches the TheNation.com and SocialistWorker.org in vain for an article addressing—much less condemning—the police-military lockdown. Nor do these publications seriously examine the host of questions that point to the involvement of state agencies, in one or another form, in the bombings.

The *com* *placency* is writpalpable. Parker, who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, one of the towns occupied by police and troops on April 19, notes in "After Boston: The Banality of Shock and Sentiment" (April 22), that the Tsarnaev brothers lived "just two blocks from the hockey rink where my sons have skated for more than a decade." Parker was "dismayed" by the media coverage and the official reaction, but fails to even mention the city's lockdown—an event that can hardly be described as "banal."

Lead immigration writer Aura Bogado on April 22 affected a posture of supreme concern over "how this will play out for communities of color in the short run and in the long run." ("Let's Not Normalize This Thing Called 'Terrorism': A Conversation with Sohail Daulatzai"). But three days later, on April 25, Bogado was far less alarmed, complaining that Republican senators were using the Boston bombing as "an unfortunate distraction" standing in the way of the Obama administration's immigration "reform" ("No, Chuck Grassley, the Tsarnaev Brothers Were Not in the Shadows").

Several articles on TheNation.org speculate on the ramifications for US-Russian relations, given the family background of the two suspects in former-Soviet Central Asia. These are written from the standpoint of offering foreign policy advice to the Obama administration, and include three articles by lead foreign policy writer Robert Dreyfuss: "The US, Russia and Chechnya After Boston" (April 22), "The Chechen-Dagestan Connection to Boston" (April 23), "Wanted: US-Russia Deal on Syria" (April 24). There is also Thomas Goltz's "Is There a Chechen Connection to the Boston Bombings?" (April 24). None of these articles refers to the threat to democratic rights posed by the Obama administration's lockdown.

The closest TheNation.org comes to warning of the grave implications of the imposition of virtual martial law conditions comes from sports writer Dave Zirin—but from the standpoint of concern over whether he will be able to enjoy the Boston Marathon next year. ("Why We Must Protect Next Year's Boston Marathon From Ourselves," April 20). Zirin cross posts his articles on SocialistWorker.org.

It is not that the editors and writers of TheNation.org are unaware. We find near the end of Tom Engelhard's 3,000 word

retrospective, “The Long March of Jeremy Scahill’s ‘Dirty Wars,’” the following paragraph:

“Almost unnoticed, imperial wars also have a way of coming home. Take the reaction to the Boston marathon bombings. The response was certainly the largest, most militarized manhunt in American history... An eighty-seven-square-mile metropolitan area was almost totally locked down... It was a spectacle that would have been unimaginable in pre-9/11 America.”

Unimaginable in pre-9/11 America, but accepted without protest by the *Nation* in 2013. Such is the collapse of American liberalism.

SocialistWorker.org is even more crude in its attempts to obscure the fundamental class and historical issues underlying the Boston lockdown and inject racial politics into the events surrounding the bombings. Not accidentally, its articles barely mention President Obama.

Headlines on SocialistWorker.org exhibit these pseudo-socialists’ obsession with race and indifference to the specter of dictatorship: “Through the media’s prejudiced lens” (April 17), “A Fog of Prejudices” (April 24), “Balanced between Solidarity and Racism” (April 19), and “The Tide of Islamophobia” (April 23). SocialistWorker.org also reposted a number of previously published articles touching on such subjects as “hate.”

The only article that might appear to address the threat posed to democracy is Nicole Colson’s April 22 “Don’t let them use fear to lock down our rights.” The article makes mention of the suspension of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s Miranda rights, but makes no reference to the lockdown of Boston, the house-to-house searches, etc.

The article’s primary concern is “the racist assumptions about ‘terrorism’ that simmer below the surface in the US media and political establishment.” Presumably, if these “racist assumptions” could simply be washed away, a new flowering of democracy would follow.

Typical of SocialistWorker.org’s coverage is the editorial comment by leading ISO figure Alan Maass, “A fog of prejudices,” which appeared on April 24. Maass discusses at length “the revival of anti-Islam myths and lies,” but in 2,700 words finds no space to mention the police-military occupation of Boston.

An April 25 editorial entitled “State of fear” likewise fails to mention the lockdown. But it includes one paragraph that gives expression to the politically diseased fixation of the ISO on race and its conviction that the American working class is racist.

“Last week,” the authors write, “after one suspect in the Marathon bombings was killed and another captured, the media focused on official encouraged celebrations of Boston residents— *very, very white from the looks of them* —who embraced the media- and politically generated patriotic fervor and racist message against Muslims.” [Emphasis added].

The silence of the ISO on the police state exercise in Boston

and the role of the Obama administration in escalating preparations for dictatorial forms of rule is not an aberration. After the *New York Times* published a lengthy article last May describing in detail President Obama’s personal role in ordering drone assassinations around the world, the ISO did not publish a single article on the subject for weeks. (See: “ISO silent on Obama’s kill list”).

Again, when a secret US Justice Department memo came to light on February 4 of this year asserting the right of the president to order the assassination of American citizens, the ISO failed to comment for more than a week. When the ISO does write on such issues, it does so in a manner calculated to conceal the underlying social and political issues. There is in its commentary no reference to the staggering growth of social inequality in America that is the single most important factor in the breakdown of democratic processes.

The ISO seeks to divert attention from the basic class conflict that is at the heart of the crisis of American democracy, precisely because it raises revolutionary questions and the need for a struggle by the working class against the Democratic Party and its allies in the trade union apparatus, both of which the ISO support and into which it has been integrated.

Nor does the ISO in any serious way connect the assault on democratic rights at home with the escalation of American militarism and war abroad. How could it, when it supports the neo-colonial wars waged by the Obama administration in Libya and Syria and has become a partisan of imperialist war carried out in the name of “human rights?”

The complacency and indifference to the threat of dictatorship of the *Nation* and the ISO, and the entire pseudo-left social-political milieu that they represent, is an expression of the protracted rightward evolution of ex-left elements rooted in privileged layers of the middle class. With the intensification of the crisis of American and world capitalism, the immense sharpening of antagonisms between the major classes, and the growth of social discontent presaging the eruption of great class battles, the upper-middle class layers that once dominated the “left” in the United States—and internationally—have moved into the camp of imperialism and social reaction.

While this is seen today most sharply in their support for imperialist crimes abroad, their visceral hostility and fear of the working class already finds expression in paralysis and adaptation to the moves by the ruling class to impose new, authoritarian forms of rule. It will increasingly emerge in the form of open support for state repression against mass struggles by the working class.



To contact the WWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**