

Behind the war against ISIS

Bill Van Auken
4 October 2014

The governments of both Australia and Canada Friday formally joined the new war that Washington has launched in the Middle East, ostensibly for the purpose of crushing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said that his government has ordered the country's warplanes to join in the air strikes in Iraq and is deploying special forces operatives on the ground there in what he proclaimed "an essentially humanitarian mission." Canada's prime minister, Stephen Harper, similarly announced the dispatch of warplanes, declaring that ISIS is targeting Canadians and that "left unchecked, this terrorist threat can only grow."

The US, France and Britain are already carrying out air strikes and other military operations in Iraq and Syria. Germany has sent arms and paratroopers to Iraq's Kurdish region. The Netherlands has dispatched F-16s to join in the bombings, while a number of other European governments are shipping arms and equipment into the region.

With this extraordinary gang-up of both major and lesser Western powers, exploiting the actions of ISIS to legitimize military intervention, mankind is witnessing the revival in its 21st century version of the kind of imperialist carve-ups that ultimately gave rise to the First and Second World Wars.

What are Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and others doing dropping bombs on Iraq? They know that it is the price of doing business in the US-led scramble to redivide the oil-rich Middle East.

The same methods were employed in the first major US imperialist intervention in the region, the Persian Gulf War of 1990, when a whole number of countries that had never been attacked by Iraq were recruited to legitimize the US assault on the country. Then as now, it was to assure themselves a share of the loot.

As the International Committee of the Fourth

International wrote in 1991, assessing the significance of this experience:

"In their determination to destroy and plunder Iraq, the imperialists displayed an astonishing unity of purpose. The proceedings at the United Nations, the rather seedy center of imperialist debauchery, were as dignified as those of a military brothel, with scores of bourgeois diplomats lining up outside the doors of the Security Council to 'get in on the action' ... Underlying the broad participation in this coalition was the unstated understanding that the war against Iraq would legitimize a revival of colonial policy by all the imperialist powers."

In every country, the rush to military action in Iraq and Syria has been accompanied by unrestrained war propaganda on the part of both governments and the servile media, which take advantage of the lack of information and confusion to try and stampede the people into war. Nowhere is this expressed more shamelessly than in the editorial published by the *New York Times* Friday entitled "The Fundamental Horror of ISIS."

"The mind rebels at the reports of cruelty by the Islamic State," the editorial begins. Citing reports of beheadings, torture, rapes and massacres, the *Times* declares that ISIS "stands alone in its deliberate, systematic and public savagery." The editorial concludes that "it must be degraded and ultimately destroyed, to use President Obama's apt terms."

Who are they to lecture anyone about "cruelty" and "savagery?" This same editorial board fully supported the Bush administration in launching an invasion of Iraq that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. This war of aggression remains the premier crime of the 21st century, its catastrophic social destruction giving rise to the present crisis throughout the region.

Even excluding the mass murders carried out directly by US imperialism, when it comes to "cruelty" and

“savagery,” ISIS is a bunch of amateurs compared to the client regimes and mercenary forces supported by Washington. With US support, military juntas in Chile and Argentina murdered tens of thousands in detention camps and torture centers, throwing workers and youth from helicopters to die in the sea, while the CIA helped found a dictatorship in Indonesia over the corpses of half a million victims.

The Nicaraguan contras, organized and financed by the US government, killed tens of thousands and committed every crime for which the *Times* indicts ISIS—massacres of civilians, rapes, executions of children—all the while hailed as “freedom fighters” by the president of the United States.

Within little more than the last year, Egypt’s military-dominated regime, supported by Obama, massacred thousands while imprisoning and torturing tens of thousands more, and Washington’s closest ally in the region, Israel, carried out a savage war on the defenseless population of Gaza, killing nearly 2,200 Palestinians and wounding 11,000 more.

The call by the *Times* for a military crusade against “savagery,” “zealots” and “raw evil” is an echo of the rhetoric employed by the yellow press over a century ago, when the US, then a newly rising global power, joined a similar imperialist gang-up against an anti-Western insurgency—China’s Boxer Rebellion of 1898 to 1900.

The Boxers, a proto-nationalist secret society, developed into a mass movement based on popular resentment of China’s subjugation and humiliation by the Western powers, which carved the country up into various “spheres of influence.” The Boxers beheaded foreign missionaries and massacred Christian converts in a wave of violence directed against the foreigners who dominated the country’s political and economic life.

Then too, the various imperialist powers seemed to act as one, with the British, Germans, Russians, Americans, Italians, French, Austro-Hungarians and Japanese forming a common expeditionary force of nearly 50,000 to drown the rebellion in blood and tighten their grip on China’s markets and resources.

The Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin, writing in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, criticized the German Social Democrat Karl Kautsky for citing this united military action

against the Boxers as proof of a new “ultra-imperialism” in which “internationally united finance capital” could overcome national rivalries. Such alliances, Lenin wrote, “are inevitably nothing more than a ‘truce’ in periods between wars. Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars ...”

Lenin’s analysis was substantiated by the events that followed the expedition against the Boxers. Within less than four years, two of the allies—Japan and Russia—would fight a bloody war over control of Manchuria and Korea. And 10 years after that, all of them would be engulfed in the First World War and the slaughter of tens of millions.

The present united crusade against ISIS will prove to have as great a historical significance in the affairs of world imperialism as the war waged against the Boxer Rebellion 114 years ago.

In the name of a struggle against “terrorism” and the defense of “civilization” against “savagery,” all of the imperialist powers are again going to war and, as in the case of Germany, rearming and re-embracing militarism with a speed that appears aimed at making up for lost time. This turn to war is driven by the crisis of world capitalism and its fundamental contradictions, in the first instance, between the development of a globally integrated economy and the continued division of the planet into antagonistic nation states.

The accelerating intervention in Iraq and Syria and the escalating turn to militarism by all of the major powers will inevitably become the ante-chamber of a world imperialist conflagration without the intervention of the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to the capitalist system, which is the source of war.

We urge our readers to read the ICFI statement “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War” and make the decision to join this party and take up the fight for socialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact