

Pseudo-left silent on Seymour Hersh's exposé of US strike against Syria

Josh Varlin
5 July 2017

It has been over a week since the German daily *Die Welt* published Seymour Hersh's exposé of the US missile strike against Syria in April. The main pseudo-left organizations and publications have maintained a stony silence on the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist's most recent article.

Hersh's article, "Trump's Red Line," based on US intelligence sources, documents that the US intelligence apparatus knew that the Syrian attack on Khan Sheikhoun on April 4 was a conventional weapons attack on a meeting of anti-regime Islamists. Plans for the attack were communicated to the US military-intelligence apparatus ahead of time by the Russian military.

"A Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA) by the US military later determined that the heat and force of the 500-pound Syrian bomb triggered a series of secondary explosions that could have generated a huge toxic cloud that began to spread over the town, formed by the release of the fertilizers, disinfectants and other goods stored in the basement, its effect magnified by the dense morning air, which trapped the fumes close to the ground," Hersh writes.

The Syrian bombing of Khan Sheikhoun was used as a pretext by the Trump administration for firing 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at the al-Shayrat airbase, reportedly killing nine civilians. The Democratic Party, which has based its opposition to Trump on demands that it adopt a harder line against Syria and Russia, supported the strikes.

The pseudo-left has followed the lead of the mainstream press in studiously ignoring Hersh's article. As of this writing, the article has received no mention whatsoever in *Socialist Worker* (the publication of the International Socialist Organization), *International Viewpoint* (the organ of the Pabloite

United Secretariat), *Jacobin* (a magazine tied to the Democratic Socialists of America) or Socialist Alternative's website.

These publications and the organizations to which they are tied claim association with socialism, Marxism and even Trotskyism. They all claim to oppose imperialism and the right-wing presidency of Donald Trump. Yet, after Hersh—the veteran investigative journalist who exposed the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War—provides detailed evidence that the Trump administration's pretext for bombing a former colonial country was known to be false, they say nothing.

There is no politically innocent explanation for the pseudo-left's silence on Hersh's article. The ISO and *International Viewpoint*, in particular, have supported US imperialism in Syria. They function as political adjuncts of the Democratic Party and the sections of the state with which it is allied.

The ISO regularly publishes articles by pro-war propagandists Ashley Smith and Gilbert Achcar. Smith has emerged as an unabashed "left" proponent of war against Syria, criticizing then-US President Barack Obama for "refus[ing] to supply the FSA [Free Syrian Army] with weapons it pleaded for to defend itself against regime air strikes."

In 2015, Michael Karadjis, writing in *Socialist Worker*, referred to Hersh's article, "The Red Line and the Rat Line," published in the *London Review of Books* in April 2014, as "widely discredited." Hersh's article reported that the Turkish government, working through its proxies on the ground in Syria, staged the August 2013 gas attack in a suburb of Damascus to provide a pretext for a direct US military attack on the regime of Bashar al-Assad. By whom was the article discredited? With what information? Karadjis did not

say.

In the aftermath of last April's US attack on Syria, *International Viewpoint* published an article by Frieda Afary and Joseph Daher that began by accepting the claim that the Syrian government carried out the chemical weapons attack on April 4. The article criticized the US government for not seeking the ouster of Assad and concluded by calling for "antiwar movements" in Iran and Russia (but not in the US).

Likewise, *Jacobin*, whose editor and publisher Bhaskar Sunkara is a leading member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has ignored Hersh's exposé. *Jacobin* is characterized by a certain eclecticism. On Syria, it publishes articles praising the "Syrian revolution" and criticizing the US for not seeking Assad's removal, while also publishing articles criticizing US imperialist intervention in the country.

Nevertheless, *Jacobin*—like *International Viewpoint* and the ISO—has favorably featured Achcar's views (in *Jacobin*'s case with a lengthy, friendly interview, while the ISO and the Pabloites simply publish his writings). Achcar was an apologist for the US-NATO bombing of Libya in 2011 on "humanitarian" grounds, and has portrayed "Russian imperialism" as engaged in an "inter-imperialist competition" with the US.

Meanwhile, Socialist Alternative has continued its longstanding policy of saying as little as possible on foreign affairs. There is nothing about Hersh's article on its website or the website of the international organization with which it is affiliated, the Committee for a Workers' International. An examination of Socialist Alternative's website could lead one to believe that the US exists in a vacuum, and that one can oppose US capitalism at home without opposing the foreign policy of the American bourgeoisie.

Socialist Alternative supported Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders during the Democratic Party primary, going so far as to establish "#Movement4Bernie." While posturing as a "democratic socialist," Sanders endorsed Obama's aggressive foreign policy, including the use of drones, and supported Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of the military-intelligence complex, in the presidential race.

Socialist Alternative continues to promote Sanders as the potential leader of "a new mass left party," even though he is now a member of the Democratic leadership caucus in the Senate.

The silence of these pseudo-left organizations brings them into a de facto alliance with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the broadcast and cable news networks and the entire corporate-controlled and state-dominated establishment media, which have blacklisted Hersh and make a practice of downplaying or censoring any information that contradicts the propaganda line of the US government. These fake socialist organizations, of course, offer no explanation to their readers for their participation in this blacklist.

Their silence on Hersh's exposé and implicit or explicit apologetics for US imperialism are the product of their history and class orientation. The DSA emerged from a split in the Socialist Party, which last had a Marxist wing in the early part of the twentieth century. Socialist Alternative, the ISO and the United Secretariat are all rooted in political tendencies that broke with Trotskyism and Marxism long ago.

The past half century has seen a significant rightward trajectory of these tendencies. They have abandoned the radicalism of the 1960s and moved rapidly to make peace with US imperialism—now dressed in "humanitarian" garb. Their principal social base is in layers of the upper-middle class whose wealth is tied to the stock market, and whose conflict with the parties of the ruling class is centered on the distribution of wealth within the top 10 percent of the population.

The election of Barack Obama in 2008, which the ISO called "transformative," was the occasion for much of the pseudo-left to jettison whatever remained of their anti-imperialist pretensions.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact