Trump embraces the “Syrian revolution”: The bankruptcy of the pro-imperialist pseudo-left

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US President and would-be dictator Donald Trump met Wednesday morning in Riyadh with Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa. During the meeting, Trump praised the head of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—a group that originated as an affiliate of al-Qaeda—as a “young, attractive guy. Tough guy. Strong past. Very strong past. Fighter.”

Until only a few months ago, the US government had a $10 million bounty on al-Sharaa, the leader of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front during the early stages of the US-backed regime change war in Syria. This all changed when his Islamist forces overthrew Bashar al-Assad in December, exploiting the regime’s collapse under the weight of the Israeli-US assault on its allies in Lebanon and Iran.

Trump’s praise for al-Sharaa followed his announcement that the United States would lift its crippling sanctions on Syria, which were originally imposed to topple the Assad regime. The move paves the way for billions of dollars in investment, primarily from Saudi Arabia and other despotic Gulf monarchies, as well as Turkey, bolstering the new regime as a bulwark against Iran.

These developments are a fitting culmination to the fabricated “Syrian revolution” promoted around the world for close to 15 years by a host of pro-imperialist, pseudo-left political parties.

Groups like France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party, the Pabloite *International Viewpoint* publication, and the US-based International Socialist Organization—which later dissolved itself into the Democratic Socialists of America—led efforts to promote the so-called “Syrian revolution.” Starting in 2011, they falsely equated the US-backed, sectarian-led civil war in Syria with the revolutionary uprisings of the Tunisian and Egyptian working class that toppled the Western-backed regimes of Ben Ali and Mubarak.

The line of these organizations and others internationally was that the *World Socialist Web Site*’s exposure of the actual character of the “Syrian Revolution” was an expression of “knee-jerk anti-imperialists,” as the Australian Socialist Alternative leader Corey Oakley put it in 2012. Gilbert Achcar, then a leading member of the NPA, boasted in 2011 about meeting with the CIA-backed Syrian National Council to discuss war strategy. Achcar, who holds a post as a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, subsequently delivered lectures to the British military’s Defence Cultural Specialist Unit, specialising in counter-insurgency.

In 2013, the US-based ISO published a statement under the headline “Solidarity with the Syrian revolution,” declaring that “the fight in Syria is an extension of the fight for freedom regionally and worldwide.” The same year, Germany’s Left Party, whose origins lie in the Stalinist state party of the former East Germany, held a series of meetings with the Syrian “oppositionist” Michel Kilo, who invoked Washington’s “obligation to carry out the military strike” necessary to topple Assad.

At the time, the Obama administration debated launching airstrikes on Syria, ultimately opting instead to arm Sunni and Kurdish opposition groups and begin bombing Syria and Iraq the following year under the pretext of fighting ISIS. Germany’s Left Party backed the deployment of military ships to disarm Assad and hailed the Kurdish nationalist regions as models of democracy.

In 2016, the misnamed Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is aligned with the Left Party, published a book titled *Revolution in Rojava* (the name adopted by the Kurdish regions in northeastern Syria) in which they claimed that Kurdish “grassroots democracy” was defended against ISIS “thanks to the air strikes carried out by the US-led coalition under the pressure of a global public.” The leaders of this “grassroots democracy” concluded a deal earlier this year with the former jihadist Al-Sharaa to integrate their military forces into the state under the control of the pro-imperialist HTS regime.

That year, the pseudo-left organizations launched a campaign to denounce a temporary cease-fire in Syria brokered by the US and Russia during the Obama administration. Achcar, along with the ISO’s Ashley Smith, criticized the White House for lacking the appetite to engage in a full-scale confrontation with Russia by, in the words of Achcar, not “providing the Syrian opposition with anti-aircraft missiles capable of limiting the Syrian regime’s use of air power.”

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Whenever Assad crossed “red lines,” Smith wrote, “the US preferred to cut deals with Russia rather than take any action that might topple Assad, but also threaten a wider upheaval.”

The Pabloites and other pseudo-left forces continued to serve essentially as government advisers to the imperialists as the former al-Qaeda fighter al-Sharaa led his HTS forces to Damascus last December amid the crumbling of the Assad regime. Assad’s downfall was inseparable from the US-backed Israeli genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza and savage bombardment of Lebanon, which weakened Hezbollah and prevented Iran from deploying military forces to back Assad.

This did not stop Achcar declaring on 11 December, “While observing the amazing historical events that unfolded since last Friday, the first thing that came to mind was relief and joy.” The Morenoite International Workers League—Fourth International (LIT—CI) proclaimed: “The Syrian Revolution has defeated the dictatorship after 13 years of struggle.” Oakley, who coined the term “knee-jerk anti-imperialism,” enthused, “Overnight, Syria has gone from being the most despotic state in the Middle East to the freest.”

As the true character of the HTS regime has been laid bare, with repeated massacres of Alawites and other minorities—including an orgy of state-sponsored violence in March that killed an estimated 1,700 civilians—the pseudo-left propagandists for imperialist dominance over Syria have rushed to touch up its “revolutionary” facade. Australia’s Socialist Alternative dispatched a correspondent to Syria immediately after HTS came to power in December, where he wrote in rapture about the joy of “Entering free Syria.”

Trump’s public embrace of Al-Sharaa demonstrates the extent of the deceit perpetrated by the entire pseudo-left with their blather about a victorious “revolution” and “free Syria.” The US president lectured the imperialists’ newest ally in the Middle East about the need to normalize relations with the genocidal Zionist regime and demanded that Al-Sharaa do more to expel “foreign terrorists” from Syria, an unmistakable reference to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps and aligned militias.

The use of the term “pseudo-left” is not a rhetorical flourish. It is an accurate characterization of reactionary middle class organizations that function as agencies of imperialism. These organizations speak for privileged material interests of the upper-middle class. These class interests are not merely compatible with, but depend upon imperialist war and plunder, which explains why they endorse the imperialist regime-change operation in Syria and the US-NATO war against Russia.

The pseudo-left’s support for imperialist-backed regime-change in Syria reveals the historical significance of the struggle waged over decades by the International Committee of the Fourth International against this political tendency and its predecessors.

The origins of the Pabloite organizations, which are prominent within the pseudo-left milieu, lie in a split from the Trotskyist movement led by Michel Pablo in 1953 on the basis of an explicit rejection of the revolutionary capacity of the working class. Abandoning the socialist principle—established by Marx and Engels—that the working class is the leading revolutionary force under capitalism, the Pabloites sought new allies in sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, bourgeois nationalist movements in the ex-colonial countries, and social democrats and trade union bureaucrats in the imperialist centers.

Having long ago jettisoned any association whatsoever with socialist politics and turned to the unrestrained pursuit of their material privileges within the framework of decaying world capitalism, the Pabloites and allied organizations today stand exposed as direct servants and collaborators of imperialism.

The decisive task facing workers, young people and intellectuals around the world who want to fight imperialist war and neocolonial domination, in the Middle East and elsewhere, is to assimilate the key lessons won in struggle for the program of world socialist revolution by the ICFI against Pabloism and all forms of revisionism.

In the context of a renewed redivision of the world among the imperialist powers reviving brutal colonial forms of rule and genocide, these lessons include uncompromising opposition to the imperialist powers and imperialist war, and the fight for the political independence of the working class from all factions of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois forces who seek alliances with imperialism or other major powers in the name of a “democratic” or “revolutionary” transformation.

A successful struggle against imperialist war and dictatorship requires the building of the ICFI and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties as the revolutionary leadership necessary to mobilize the working class in the imperialist centers and former colonial countries on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

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