

Jacobin calls anti-capitalist opposition to war “sectarian”

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On March 18, *Jacobin*, the online publication affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), published an article by Eric Blanc titled “Sectarianism Has Never Ended a War.” By “sectarianism” Blanc means adherence to socialist principles and opposition to the Democratic Party.

Blanc’s latest commentary develops themes he advanced on March 9 in a *Jacobin* article headlined “Why Is There No Antiwar Movement in the US?” As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote of that essay: “The piece is essentially a political brief for the Democratic Party, calling for the subordination of antiwar sentiment to the interests of American imperialism.”

These articles appear as the Trump administration is deploying thousands of Marines to Iran in preparation for a land invasion that will have catastrophic consequences for the populations of Iran, the United States, the broader Middle East and, indeed, the entire world. Untold thousands of soldiers will die on both sides and Washington’s illegal war of aggression will metastasize into a global conflict, increasing the danger of nuclear war. Trump is already demanding another \$200 billion to fund the war, the cost of which will be borne by the working class in the form of brutal social cuts and an escalation of the drive to dictatorship.

Under conditions where a large majority of Americans already oppose the war and strikes are spreading across the country, opposition to the war is bound to erupt, drawing in millions of workers. For the American ruling class, the great danger is that mass opposition will escape the confines of official politics and its two-party system, and assume a revolutionary, anti-capitalist character.

This is the context in which *Jacobin* and the DSA, agencies of the Democratic Party, wage war against what they call “sectarianism” and “ultra-leftism.”

Blanc begins by denouncing “anti-imperialist radicals” for criticizing New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s attack on Palestinian author and activist Susan Abulhawa at a recent press conference. The DSA-Democratic mayor, responding to right-wing attacks on Abulhawa as an “antisemite,” called her social media posts on Israel “reprehensible.” Blanc solidarizes himself with Mamdani and the Zionist lobby, falsely accusing Abulhawa, the daughter of Palestinians forced from their home by the 1948 Nakba and then into exile by the 1967 war, of “clear antisemitism.”

The controversy around Abulhawa, Blanc writes, is indicative of “the prevalence of counterproductive sectarianism among too

many American anti-imperialists.” He proceeds to argue that the record of the anti-Vietnam War protest movement proves the correctness of his proscription against infusing opposition to war with a socialist, internationalist and revolutionary perspective and basing anti-war resistance on the working class.

He claims that the tactic of limiting the mass protests against the war to a single demand, “Out Now,” and directing antiwar sentiment into pressuring the Democratic Party rather than breaking with the Democrats and fighting for an independent political movement of the working class, “put an end to the Vietnam War.” In fact, the channeling of mass opposition to the war behind the Democratic Party, which was overwhelmingly pro-war, enabled the election of Richard Nixon and the escalation of the war. The Vietnam War did not end until the fall of Saigon in 1975, two years after the withdrawal of American forces.

Blanc praises the political line in the antiwar movement of the Socialist Workers Party and its 1968 presidential candidate Fred Halstead. They led an antiwar front called the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC), which called mass protests from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. While hundreds of thousands and even millions marched against the war, the SWP disoriented the movement by channeling it behind Democratic Party war critics on the basis of the single protest demand, “Out Now.” This is what Blanc praises, deceptively calling it “independent mass politics,” and presenting it as the model for antiwar opposition today.

The links between NPAC and the Democratic Party were not subtle. Indiana Senator Vance Hartke sat on NPAC’s steering committee. Democratic politicians such as Rep. Bella Abzug of New York, a rabid Zionist, and Rep. Abner Mikva of Chicago spoke at NPAC rallies.

Far from advancing the struggle against war, the SWP’s perspective misled youth and workers who opposed the war and blocked the development of socialist consciousness. When Nixon withdrew American troops and ended the draft in 1973, the antiwar movement collapsed. This was at a point of explosive crisis within the political establishment, culminating in the resignation of Nixon in August 1974. But the ruling class was able to restabilize its rule due in large part to the disorientation of workers and youth produced by the opportunist and class collaborationist politics that dominated the movement against the Vietnam War.

Indeed, the United States has conducted hundreds of military interventions since the end of the Vietnam War. A partial list includes: Lebanon (1982-1984), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989),

Iraq (1990-1991), Somalia (1992-1994), Bosnia (1993-1995), Haiti (1994), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001-2021), Iraq (2003-2011), Libya (2011), Iraq and Syria (2014-2021), Venezuela (2026) and Iran (2026).

When Blanc speaks of “sectarianism,” he is above all referring to the Socialist Equality Party, the International Committee of the Fourth International, and the *World Socialist Web Site*. He never refers to them by name, however, for fear of drawing attention to the genuine continuators of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism. The Workers League, the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, opposed the political line of the SWP and the Communist Party in the movement against the Vietnam War. It called for the building of a Labor Party based on the trade unions, and a socialist program to establish the political independence of the working class in the fight against imperialist war and capitalist exploitation.

The position of the DSA is so far to the right that Blanc devotes a considerable portion of his article to attacking the line of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the anti-Vietnam War movement. The SDS was essentially reformist, but it did seek to link the struggle against the war to the fight against capitalism and racism. Denouncing this, Blanc writes:

Alongside them, the national leadership of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) increasingly argued that the antiwar movement should adopt a “multi-issue” program encompassing opposition to racism, capitalism, and imperialism as a whole...

Further on, he criticizes SDS for its “impulse to load every coalition and protest with every demand—to insist that every antiwar mobilization also be an anti-Zionist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist formation...”

In the course of the article, Blanc repeatedly praises the single issue protest policy, which dominated the anti-Vietnam War movement, for its perspective of pressuring the war criminals who rule the United States. He writes:

- “Only concrete, immediate, nonnegotiable demands generated maximum pressure to actually constrain the ruling class.”
- “But the task remains to build the kind of mass movement that can reach into the places where power actually operates and make it impossible for business as usual to continue.”
- “You build something so large, so broad, and so persistent that the people whose hands are on the machinery start to refuse.”

Under the heading “What This Means Now” Blanc indicates what the DSA’s policy is in regard to the Iran War and the popular opposition to it. He writes: “The continued refusal of Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries to take a hard stance against the illegitimacy of this war in Iran is deplorable. Fortunately, the Democratic base is increasingly irate at the old guard.”

In other words, the opposition to this illegal war of aggression and mass murder must be channeled behind the Democratic Party’s “new guard”: Bernie Sanders, Zohran Mamdani, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and company.

As bankrupt as this perspective was at the time of the Vietnam

War, it is doubly reactionary after 50 years of decline of American capitalism and the putrefaction of American democracy, which the DSA ignores. *Jacobin* pushes the fatal illusion that pressure from below can “contain the ruling class” under conditions of the evisceration of democratic norms by a fascist president who represents a financial oligarchy. The nominal opposition party, the Democrats, put up no real opposition because they represent the same class interests. They spearheaded the genocide in Gaza and attack Trump for refusing to escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine.

This perspective of blocking the independent mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system and all of its parties and agencies, including the trade union bureaucracy, would lead to the victory of fascism and the certainty of world war, including the nuclear incineration of the world. Imperialism is already carrying out genocide in Gaza, and the fate of the mass international protests against it, involving tens of millions of people, is the clearest refutation of the perspective advanced by the DSA. These protests had no effect on the support of imperialist governments for Israeli war crimes precisely because they were channeled into appeals to the war criminals.

History has, however, provided one example of mass social and political action hastening the end of war, and it was led precisely by Blanc’s so-called “sectarians.” It is a historical fact that the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, led by the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, created conditions of revolutionary working class upsurge across Europe and beyond that compelled the capitalist ruling classes to end the war the following year.

This is the perspective that must be adopted by workers and youth today in the US and internationally, in opposition to the treacherous politics of the DSA and the rest of the pseudo-left. Imperialist war and fascism must be defeated by putting an end to capitalism, their root cause.



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