

COMMENT

Afghanistan is crystallising, rather than having caused, a new world situation, though of course it makes its own contribution to it.

The main features of this new situation are an intense new "Cold War" drive by the United States, backed by Britain and Australia in particular, and the shaping of new alignments, especially between the US and China.

This process was already well advanced before Afghanistan. In the last issue of *ALR* Michael Klare outlined the struggle going on between different US ruling class groupings he characterised as "the Prussians" and "the Traders". He cites a special issue of *Business Week* on "the Decline of US Power" whose (Prussian) editors "called for a revitalised military capacity to protect US interests abroad. Without a more activist foreign policy they argued, America's favored economic standing may soon vanish. 'The policies set in motion during the Viet Nam war are now threatening the way of life built since World War II'."

The Prussians "insist that as the world becomes more turbulent and chaotic, America must use its military clout to prevent Third World upstarts from upsetting the global economic applecart".

Iran, of course, was a particular case in point.

The "policies set in motion by the Viet Nam war" included the "Nixon Doctrine" that US forces should never again become directly involved in military operations in Third World countries and that others such as the Shah should do the dirty work. "The armed forces lost half their uniformed personnel, thus eliminating future openings for thousands of generals, admirals and

other top career officers. The Pentagon budget was reduced causing a significant drop in defence contracts. The CIA was forced to undergo an unprecedented public probe of its secret operations, and lost many veteran 'spooks' through a massive layoff of senior personnel." The President's independent (of Congress) warmaking powers were curtailed.

This drive by the Prussians to overcome "the Viet Nam Syndrome" and to "Re-legitimise intervention" in fact made significant progress before Afghanistan.

The awesome Polaris submarine (see *Nuclear Countdown* No. 1) was pushed ahead; new cruise nuclear ballistic missiles were to be installed in Europe; military spending was up; Salt 2 ratification possibilities were reaching zero; a special 100,000-strong "Rapid Development Force" for intervention in the Middle East was created; and the development of the US-China alliance proceeded apace.

Cold War Sources

One hardly has to be a marxist to identify the world economic crisis which began soon after the Viet Nam war ended as the source of the Prussians' present policy, just as World Wars I and II, not to speak of hundreds of other wars presented (to paraphrase Clausewitz) the continuation of capitalist economic compulsions and policies by warlike means.

But the present crisis is more profound and all-pervading with many new problems, both economic and social, eating away at capitalist stability and confidence in the future. The resources/energy crisis is but one such problem, though of course a major one.

The Statement by Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General George S. Brown of the US Air Force *On the Defence Posture of the United States for Fiscal Year 1977* (dated January 1976), was heavily resource oriented.

It says "Since World War II, the United States has moved from near self-sufficiency in natural resources to increasing dependence on imports in many critical areas. The USSR, by contrast, is nearly self-sufficient in natural resources." (page 5.)

It lists 14 strategic metals in which imports comprise 50 to 100 per cent of US supplies, and the countries from which they come.

It then traverses the globe by regions, saying of Africa (for example): "The vast African continent is an area which warrants continued attention not only for its strategic geographical position and sheer size, but as a source of the materials which are becoming increasingly important to the industrialised world Africa has not swung towards the Communists, but neither has it swung towards the West. Any large-scale breach of the peace could destroy capital investment of American firms and interrupt US access to important raw materials, such as aluminium, chromium, oil, manganese, tin, tungsten, copper, iron, and lead." (pp. 12 and 20.)

Middle East oil, it says "is essential to the allied forces which support US defence commitments as well as to the general economy of the United States and her allies in Western Europe and Asia. The continued access to Middle East oil at reasonable prices for our NATO allies, Japan and the United States must remain a primary US objective in the region for the foreseeable future." (p. 18.)

A more strident, even hysterical note has been struck since the fall of the Shah, the holding of US hostages, the deepening of the energy crisis and the economic deterioration generally.

As usual, when sacrifices and losses, rather than profits, are to be shared, each capitalist power tends more to go its own way, hence the less than whole-hearted enthusiasm with which the Carter-Fraser-Thatcher war dance has been received in Europe and Japan.



Nor are the masses of people, whose living and social conditions and prospects are under attack today, as susceptible to cold war mongering as they became in the earlier period.

But the war drive has deep roots, and the dependence of the rest of the capitalist world on the US — especially its military, but also its economic might — operates to one degree or another to force every capitalist country into line, so the dangers cannot be underestimated.

Combatting them is the urgent task of everyone on the left and all anti-war forces.

Soviet Motivations

Rebutting the basis on which the anti-Soviet campaign is built — that the move into Afghanistan is but one step of a far-reaching plan to "seize 'the West's' oil" in the Middle East on a march to world domination — is part of this.

As stated in *Tribune* articles, and by all but the lunatic fringe of political commentators, the Soviet move is a reaction rather than an initiation. It is a defensive move prompted by the general world scene described above, and the worry about instability in a bordering country within its close sphere of influence, and a concern with "encirclement" by a US-China-West Europe alliance.

The fact that these fears can be understood is, however, no reason why the Soviet perception of a necessity to move into Afghanistan would be accepted, or why socialist forces outside the Soviet Union are compelled to share the view that gains from the move outweigh losses. Often in the past, also, Soviet perceptions of the requirements of a particular situation have clashed with those of socialists elsewhere. An independent assessment must be made.

The nature of the responses in various sections of the left, sometimes surprising in the light of past standpoints, also indicates the need for further independent analysis.

Principles and Real Life

Here I will examine the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries (or the right of self-determination of nations), the principle of the non-export of revolution (or the limits, if any, on external aid for a socialist movement), and the effects of the Afghanistan action on the world situation as a whole.

One objection made to this approach is that "principles" are all very well, but this is a real-life situation.

It is true that no principle stands free (of other principles) or absolute (independent of the actual situation), but it is also true that no situation can be analysed from a socialist viewpoint without principles. Otherwise we would move from case to case without any guidance or standpoint. That "truth is concrete" is a "dialectical" principle we should all adopt, but the rest of human knowledge and the principles derived therefrom enter into this concrete truth.

Self-determination of Nations

The principle that socialists should uphold the right of self-determination of nations is not based on abstract morality of "rights". It derives from the view that, in the epoch where nations exist, and the oppression of some nations by others, national emancipation and social emancipation are linked, and that the attraction of socialism will be reduced and capitalism therefore gain, if socialists fail to support the right of

nations to self-determination.

In the future there may be one world, a single community of peoples, in which nations have become obsolete. There are necessities in the present world (resources, the ecology, population, the striving for equality, the "North-South" conflict) which impel in this direction.

But this is still a very long way off, and can only come about on a voluntary basis which, in turn, means recognising the right to self-determination. And, in fact, one of the most vital features of the world since the second world war has been the national liberation movement — the movement for the liberation of nations.

Socialist revolutions have also been a vital feature of this period. But in most of the outstanding cases (China, Yugoslavia, Viet Nam, Cuba, for example, these have been inextricably bound up with national liberation.

On the other hand, some of the biggest setbacks of socialism in the period have been linked with interference by the big socialist powers — first the Soviet Union and then China — in the internal affairs of other countries and communist parties, and even direct military intervention (the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia, China in Viet Nam).

It is also a fact that the emergence of multinational corporations, undermining effective national sovereignty even in developed capitalist countries, has raised the issue of national independence in another way, while also displaying the necessity to advance beyond nations, even if this occurs in distorted form.

Self-determination and socialism are linked also because the process of social transformation and liberation of working people from a multitude of oppressions has proved more difficult and more closely connected with national history, traditions and culture than most marxists realised.

This means that each nation must find its own way to socialism and make its own distinctive contribution to finding the solutions to these complex problems.

This does not mean that the principles of self-determination and non-interference automatically transcend all others, making



the solution of any issue in which they are involved straightforward and easy. But it does mean that they cannot be brushed aside for reasons of expediency, or anything but the most cogent and principled considerations.

For example, although the CPA expressed reservations about the intervention in Kampuchea, we have continued to support Viet Nam. This support is based on recognition that the Pol Pot regime, aided and abetted by China, invaded Viet Nam and refused all efforts at negotiation, and that Chinese hostility, soon to be manifested in military invasion, posed a threat to the continued existence of a genuinely independent Viet Nam.

Destruction of the detested Pol Pot regime was a by-product and would not of itself justify Viet Namese intervention. And we believe they should withdraw at the earliest possible moment, leaving the Kampuchean to exercise their right to self-determination. They say they will, and while no nation's proclamation of good intentions can be unquestioningly accepted, Viet Nam did, in fact, voluntarily withdraw from Kampuchea after the victories in the wars with France and the United States.

Aid, from one country or movement to another, to fight internal and external enemies and assist construction of a new society, is of course a principle of internationalism

But are there any limits or conditions, and if so what criteria should apply? The following might be considered.

Firstly, the most common form of aid available except where socialists are in power, is political solidarity. And it is often the most effective form of aid that can be given — for example, US, Australian and world-wide political action in support of Viet Nam's struggle against the US.

Secondly, where material aid is given it should remain under local control and direction, should not be used as a lever to force adoption of policies desired by the donor rather than the recipient, and should help and be used to create conditions for self-reliance.

The Vietnamese, even when excessively hard-pressed by the US imperialists always rejected the introduction of outside forces on the basis that they themselves knew best how to wage their struggle — and because "once they're in, it's not always easy to get them out".

Thirdly, such aid should not be such as to substitute for local effort or replace it as the main force, for this would be tantamount to the export of revolution.

It has become clear that in Afghanistan the social base of the revolution was weak outside the main towns, and especially among the peasants who comprise the great majority of the population. Thus, the agrarian reform lacked the necessary political preparation among the people, and when legislated was not sufficiently backed

by other essential measures such as control of irrigation (required in much of the country), provision of seed, etc.

Thus a social base was left for the reactionary forces which created increasing difficulties for the regime.

The other major factor in these difficulties was the long-standing factionalism in the People's Democratic Party, pursued with colorful vigor in a succession of coups, in the last of which, at least, Soviet forces were involved.

Eqbal Ahmad, editorial board member of *Afrique et Asie* and *Race and Class* calls such a regime "left-wing Bonapartism", citing Ethiopia as a further example. And, he says, "left-wing Bonapartism does not prove to be much better than right-wing Bonapartism The difference is in the language and the rhetoric also in intention. The difference is not in result. Both the regime in Ethiopia and the regime in Afghanistan, both issues of coups d'etat, were in fact, in their policies, very socialist. They immediately introduced very meaningful and wide-ranging land reforms; very meaningful — on paper — and wide-ranging educational reforms; made considerable advances — again, in principle — on the question of the emancipation of women; and they gave a great deal of lip service to, and even introduced laws, concerning the participation of workers and peasants in the running of the republic. And in fact they took steps to enforce these reforms.

"So in terms of their intention, and in terms of their program, these were actually quite genuine socialist regimes. Their programs were righteous, they were democratic, and they were just. The problem was that they didn't have any roots among the masses. And whenever you introduce massive transformatory changes in society, those changes can be misunderstood unless they are brought about with massive political education and the support of the masses." (Interview with Dorothy Healey on radio KPFFK, Los Angeles.)

Far from being overcome by Soviet intervention, these political problems are likely to become more intractable, as national as well as social and religious elements become involved in the struggle.

It is certainly grievous if a regime with good intentions and a good program should fail. But can revolutionaries adopt the standpoint that any amount of outside force to sustain it is legitimate, that "once we are in they will never get us out?" Will the socialist struggle here and elsewhere be furthered by advocating this? And how from **self-emancipation** would the socialism be which would be imported in this way?

Many of those who support the Soviet action reveal in discussion that they do in fact believe in the export of revolution, and even have the vision of "world socialism" coming as a result of a march over the globe by some "Red Army".

Apart from being fanciful, the political essence of this as yet only half-articulated idea is a pessimism about the prospects of indigenous revolution, and an unwillingness to face up to the long and painstaking task of winning sufficient adherents to build a political/social force capable of pursuing the class struggle to a successful conclusion. This, together with the over-emphasis on the role of leadership which often goes with it, shows that force from the top instead of mass movement from below is still a way of thinking. How bureaucratic a socialism it would produce if ever it had a chance!

Foreign Intervention

Stress is often put on outside intervention as the basic cause of the internal difficulties of the Afghan revolution. The "rebels" were certainly given accommodation in Pakistan and material aid by the local reactionaries and China and the United States.

But information about these "rebels" which has appeared, including on TV, shows what a motley, disunited, and mercenary crew they are. Certainly, there is no credible evidence that their existence was the main reason for the difficulties in Afghanistan or was sufficient to justify the nature and scale of Soviet intervention.

World Effects

Another justification given is that whatever the case with Afghanistan itself,

looked at from a world point of view, the Soviet intervention has advanced the socialist cause, and weakened US imperialism, for example in regard to its possibilities in Iran.

But it seems that the US has in fact been assisted — for example, to find a solution to its hostage problem and make an accommodation with the Iranian rightwing. The US “Prussians” have been able to advance their military preparations and development of bases in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.

The right wing virtually everywhere has been assisted, including in the Islamic world where progressive forces had been making advances.

It has been said that in a struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States, a “class line” demands that one support the former without reservations against the latter.

If only the world were so simple!

And such an approach would reduce other countries and movements to a passive position, reinforcing the hegemony which bloc leaders are always trying to assert. In this respect, though not in others, they may be equated.

The need today is rather for more forces, more countries and movements to have their own input into the world situation from the anti-imperialist side, for the perceptions of the Soviet leadership, made through the prism of national interests, are not always congruent with the needs of the movement in other countries, or as a whole.

The factional struggle may be “solved” by the installation of that faction seen as most congenial to Soviet perceptions of its needs. But can one expect better results from this in Afghanistan than in other countries where such measures have been applied?

Effects at Home

Fraser’s motives, like Carter’s, include electoral opportunism as well as an ideological dedication in which Mr Fraser, of long conviction, is “frontrunning for the

United States”, to use *Sydney Morning Herald* Associate Editor Peter Hastings’ apt phrase (February 16).

This combination makes the dangers of Fraser’s policies greater, not less. Peter Hastings, expressing for the third time in the above article worries about Fraser’s policy and stance, is giving voice to more than his own concern. A sizeable and more farsighted section of the Australian ruling class are worried about the possible backfiring consequences of Fraser’s “alarmist, exploitative approach” to Afghanistan. (Same article.)

There is also some concern in the degree of foreign sellout. The *Financial Review* of February 14 said in an editorial headed “Oh, how the money rolls in”: “... the stockbroking fraternity has never known a boom like this. Most of the money to fuel it is coming from overseas with Japan a new and aggressive source of private equity investment.” It worries about the likely inflational consequences of this (especially if “a billowing money supply would ensure an accommodating attitude on the part of employers to union demands”).

Another editorial two days later recalled that Mr. Fraser had told “a group of Los Angeles businessmen about the virtues of investing in Australia where he said their money was welcome and where ‘profit is not a dirty word’.

“With the return of the Liberal government in 1975 and an economy in a painful economic recession the reservations (of some earlier Liberal PMs such as Gorton) about foreign investment were eroded, and the regulations covering it steadily relaxed.

“Nowadays the Foreign Investment Review Board is little more than a rubber stamp and Australia’s Prime Minister, even when on pressing matters of international political concern, can always find time to drum up a few more investors.

“The economic case for foreign investment is undeniable when it is presented in general terms.

“However, there are quite a few areas of foreign investment where legitimate reservations can be expressed. The most important is in the area of energy resource investment, development and export.”

The reason for these carefully qualified doubts? Our old multinational friend Utah, having declared a profit of \$139 million (and raised its ship-out of dividends from \$116 million to \$134 million) has concluded an eight-year agreement with Japan to provide 9.6 million tons of Norwich Park coking coal at approximately \$US50 a tonne. The *Financial Review* sees this as becoming a benchmark for all coal export prices. The Japanese cartel has thus "once again split the Australian market".

"(But) you can't blame Utah. It is here to make a profit (and) has done so at the expense of the Australian coking coal export industry." "Australia's national interest can hardly be said to be the responsibility of Utah"

Being closely associated with them the *Review* knows the ruthless character of the multinational corporations only too well. Its whinge is really a wish to have the best of both worlds — stacks of multinational money and respect by those who bring it for the equal profit hunger of the locals. Fat chance!

In the last issue of *ALR* I outlined the Fraser government's resources, energy, industry restructuring and (they hope) election winning strategy, its deleterious effects on jobs, the environment, the uranium push, social policy, and the prospects of future generations. All these aspects will be exacerbated by a Cold War atmosphere which provides an additional push for "development no matter what".

Profit whether local or foreign, is the dirtiest of words when it comes to energy and resources.

Fraser, Anthony, Bjelke-Petersen, Court and Co. won't and can't do anything about even the greed of the locals, let alone about the longer-term effects of their resources sellout. They are far too tied up with, and dependent upon, the multinationals. And multinationals don't give a damn about the people, the future, or the fate of their "host" countries — and precious little even about their own, except as gendarmes to promote and protect their profit-making. "National" capitalists are little better, being concerned only about their own "share" of the spoils.

But a mass movement and the trade unions — and even the Labor Party, with



their prompting, could begin to radically tackle this question.

So a fight against the Cold War drive is not only a fight on foreign policy, defence spending, foreign bases and the Olympic Games, vital though those issues are. It embraces also economic issues, and specifically energy and resources.

These should all be part of a "Stop Fraser Now; Beat Him This Year" campaign. It would be foolish to be over-optimistic about the outcome of this year's federal election. But it's wonderful what a fighting spirit can do, and pleasing to hear that the Parliamentary Labor Party executive is beginning to overcome its hesitations, and perhaps also its preoccupations with Hawke and the leadership issue, and sound the note that "we need to be angry".

We do indeed; for the stakes are high. A successful Cold War drive could make it impossible to realise the better options in the struggle for socialism in this country and elsewhere, and instead promote the outbreak of chaotic and destructive political, cultural, national and military struggles, with who knows what end.

— Eric Aarons,
20.2.1980.