

Accommodation to U.S. imperialism - Decline and fall: the SWP-USA's final embrace of Zionism

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At its peak in the 1960s and early 1970s the Socialist Workers Party in the United States was the largest group to the left of the Communist Party and a major pole of attraction for radicalising youth. It was also the most dynamic and creative Marxist organisation in the USA.

The SWP of today bears no resemblance to that organisation. It now consists of a few hundred members and supporters, many of them in their fifties and older, together with a few dozen followers with the same demographic in other countries. Deliberately cutting itself off from most arenas of struggle, the SWP has little influence and few prospects for renewal. Like most left sects, its prime imperative appears to be the perpetuation of the sect and the position of its maximum leader, Jack Barnes.

A distinct feature of the ossification of the SWP has been the group's tendency to adapt to U.S. imperialism. The latest – and decisive – development along this trajectory is the SWP leadership's decision, during the Israeli slaughter in Gaza this summer, to embrace the full program of Zionism.

Some background will help to understand the significance of this development.

The days are long past when the SWP played a unique and historic role in building the U.S. movement against the war in Vietnam, thereby contributing to the defeat of U.S. imperialism and the victory of the Vietnamese people. (This story is richly detailed in "Out Now" by Fred Halstead [[1](#)].)

In contrast, today *The Militant*, the weekly voice of the SWP, cheers on the armed forces of Ukraine as they attempt to suppress a rebellion in the eastern part of the country. The civil war, with its widespread destruction and loss of life, has transformed pre-existing divisions in Ukraine into a deep chasm filled with blood that will take many years to overcome. Washington and Kiev bear the primary responsibility for this tragedy. Washington's objective throughout the crisis has been to use Ukraine as a battering ram to weaken both Ukraine and Russia. In this situation, *The Militant's* fulsome pro-Kiev and anti-Russian coverage coincides with that of the mainstream Western media. (Vladimir Putin's Russian-chauvinist response to the threats has made it much easier for Obama to achieve his goals. But a discussion of those issues would take us too far afield.)

The SWP's cheerleading for the reactionary war in Ukraine should not come as surprise. During late

2002 and early 2003, as Washington and its allies prepared to invade Iraq, the SWP's main fire was directed against the anti-war movement in the U.S. Time and again its newspaper scorned the leadership of the movement as "middle-class liberals" and highlighted some of the SWP's political differences with them. Meanwhile the SWP did nothing to organise a different kind anti-war activity. The paper kept repeating that nothing could prevent the coming invasion, thereby suggesting that all protests were futile.

To be sure, the SWP formally opposed the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. But once the U.S. occupation was in place, it also insisted that whereas the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein had been so ferocious that it had crushed all possibility of political life, the overthrow of Hussein by the U.S. would have the "unintended consequence" of opening up "political space" for the Iraqi people. It repeated this far-fetched prediction on numerous occasions. As popular resistance to the occupation began to rise, *The Militant* denounced all resistance fighters as "Baathists" who wanted to restore the Hussein dictatorship. The paper predicted that the U.S. would quickly crush the resistance.

The SWP's conduct on Iraq was a blatant betrayal of the group's basic program against imperialist war. It could not be ignored. Over a number of months four of the approximately fifteen organised Canadian supporters of the SWP at the time voiced their opposition to the group's policy. The four were expelled. All were long-standing members of the movement; in better days two of them, John Riddell and myself, had served (at different times) as executive secretary of the Canadian wing of the movement.

The SWP's accommodation to U.S. imperialism was again illustrated in 2009 when the Honduran generals overthrew the elected government of President Manuel Zelaya. Workers, peasants, indigenous people and others in that country mobilized in large numbers against the coup, while Cuba and Venezuela rallied support for them across Latin America and the Caribbean. But *The Militant* dismissed the struggle as "part of (the) infighting between wings of the capitalist class." An editorial declared that "the interests of Honduran workers and farmers do not lie in whether Zelaya returns to the presidency." It warned against "the false claim by middle-class radicals that Zelaya's ouster was a 'right-wing' coup 'made in USA.'" [2] (Washington's support for the coup was apparent at the time. Subsequent revelations have provided further evidence of its role.)

Working people in Honduras struggled heroically against the coup but were ultimately defeated. They have paid a terrible price since then. Hiding behind pseudo-ultra-left words, the SWP urged its followers to stand aside. Its shameful conduct should not be forgotten.

Earlier this year the SWP and its small band of Canadian followers publicly abandoned their support for the independence of Quebec. They hailed the result of the April 7, 2014 provincial election which saw the federalist Liberal Party defeat the pro-sovereignty Parti Québécois government, as registering "a historic victory for working people in Quebec and across Canada." A feature article published the following month stated that most aspects of the national oppression of the Québécois "have largely been overcome through struggle." Consequently, the SWP no longer supports the demand for independence. Readers were informed that "the party has not put forward the (independence) demand for at least the last decade." That was the first time that this change was communicated to readers of the paper. [