

Between Iraq's colonialist and Islamist quagmire: the "third way" is hard but possible

Ardeshir Mehrdad argues that we are not simply faced with a choice between supporting the US led imperialist cannibalisation of Iraq, or the reactionary Islamist resistance

Footnotes

1. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) totally supports the client regime of Iyad Alawi and has one senior and two junior ministers in his cabinet. The ICP, equates the armed resistance with fundamentalist terrorism, and thereby approves the suppression of the resistance. See www.iraqcp.org. The Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (W-CPI) and its splinter group (the Leftist W-CPI), while opposing the occupation and also the armed resistance, support the "workers movement" against the occupation. See: Rebwar Ahmad, "What are the differences between the Workers Communist Party of Iraq and the Iraq Communist party" www.wpiiraq.net. New Left Party in Iraq, Statement to announce the founding of Leftist Worker-Communist Party of Iraq, October 17, 2004.

www.workersliberty.org/nod/e/view/3321. Mahmood Ketabchi, "Which side is the ISO on, working class socialism or nationalism and Islamism". July 8, 2004. www.wpiiraq.net

2. After Iraq's occupation by US forces, the W-CPI, while failing to approve the resistance against such an occupation, was among those groups who wanted the "involvement of the UN to save Iraq".

3. See the letter by Sami Ramadani to Alex Gordon, representative of RMT union in the recent European Social Forum meeting in London. A shortened version of this letter is in this issue of IB-MEF. See also Alex Maas, "Iraq: workers resist US ban on unions".

Iraq, 18 months after the military occupation, remains a focus of dispute and debate among a large number of political groups, including some on the left. The main challenge is the resistance and anti-occupation movement, and the issue at stake is the nature of this movement and how to deal with it. This question (or questions) has brought about a rift among sections of the left and progressive forces outside Iraq.

Inside the country, the resistance against occupation has split the workers movement with some facing up to the occupation, and others prepared to work with the Alawi government [1]. There are not many who will openly support the occupation, yet the practises of some of the unions and their political backers will inevitably support the prolongation of the occupation. By highlighting the dangers of the ascendancy of Islamic fundamentalism or a civil war among religious and ethnic groups after the occupation forces leave, some groups question the wisdom of an immediate and unconditional end to the occupation. Some among these groups opt for a different kind of occupation by demanding that the US and British occupational forces should be replaced by the UN [2]. This split has not only aligned various political forces and parties opposite one another, this confrontation has spread to the newly formed trade unions, intellectual circles and political activists [3]

Outside Iraq a similar line-up has also taken place. At one end of this spectrum stand those who view the resistance movement as a totally fundamentalist movement, an utterly reactionary resistance and ultimately Islamofascism [4]. At the other extreme are those that see the resistance as an anti-imperialist, or a thoroughly popular movement against the colonialist occupiers [5]. Hence one pole furtively defends the continuation of the occupation and backs the suppression of resistance while the other demands on an immediate withdrawal of the occupying forces and unequivocally supports the resistance. Such an alignment is visible in more or less every engagement, gathering, and wherever left forces are present; in trade unions, academic or student circles, the feminist movement, the anti-globalisation movements and forums are all witness to this division.

The "Iraq question" is undeniably weakening the anti-war movement. As Walter Bello and a number of other commentators have noted, perhaps the real reason for the dampening of the protest against the Iraqi occupation project since last March is that a significant section of the global

peace movement, especially in the United States, is reluctant to give legitimacy to the Iraqi resistance [6]. The anti war movement responded to the attack on Iraq and an "unlimited war against terror" by mobilising millions. Now the campaign for "an immediate end to occupation" has been unable to unite all the various tendencies within it. This line-up had some effect on the European Social Forum last October in London, where the conflicting approaches to the "resistance" surfaced as one of the points of disagreement over Iraq. [7]

The essence of the split

Why have the left been subjected to such a rift in the face of the openly imperialist aggression of the USA? Why is a significant section of the left in any doubt about decisively protesting against the military occupation of Iraq and supporting the resistance against the occupation of the country? In the current polarised political spectrum, which approach can be seen as a real solution to the problem facing Iraq and its people? In what way, and how, can the secular left become a real active player in today's Iraq and intervene actively in the course of event?

These are some of the most important questions facing the leftist forces in Iraq and other Middle East countries today. This article is an attempt to provide a brief answer to these questions. We will emphasise above all that a comprehensive analysis of the issues raised above is urgently needed.

Before all else, it is imperative to stress the relative novelty of what we are experiencing in Iraq, and to point out that it may not be easy to find analogies for what is taking place in Iraq today either in the region, or globally. What we are witnessing in Iraq are developments that from the point of view of their nature, appearance and consequence have some unique features. Their understanding therefore calls for the use of appropriate theoretical frameworks.

The military assault on Iraq, its occupation and the attempts at 'economic-political reconstruction' are part of a wholly colonialist project at the dawn of the 21st century. The occupation of Iraq was one of the first practical steps that the United States government took to alter the structure of the political command of global capitalism aiming at the building a global American empire [8]. For this reason alone it stands comparison to no other event since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in international importance.

The military assault on Iraq and the economic 'reconstruction' of the country is being conducted in accordance with an unadulterated corporate model. This is a model in enclosure where as its initial and crucial step the ownership documents of the entire public wealth of the country, its resources and collective potentials, and before all else its entire oil and water resources and installations have been rewritten in the name of the Bechtels, Haliburtons and Chevron-Texacos. In Iraq, apache helicopters, cruise missiles and Abram tanks have taken on the role previously played elsewhere by supra-national institutions [9]. This too is an innovation, in its own way, in the attempts of capital to enslave the people of the planet.

The military assault on Iraq has on the one hand pulled down a rabid and repressive despotism and on the other unleashed a mass of ethnic, religious and class antagonisms and crises that have been accumulating over several decades and flung them into the political arena. The military occupation and its aftermath have ploughed the soil for ultra-conservative religious and ethnic forces to grow. These not only add to the complexity of the internal situation in Iraq but have come to threaten the future of the people of the country.

These processes, alongside many other factors, make up the "Iraq question", its complexities and contradictions. They give it a unique, and to a great extent novel, characteristic. The disagreements and rifts within the ranks of the left, notwithstanding traditional causes, can be said to be an expression of these contradictions and internal inconsistencies of the "Iraq question".

Defeat not always victory

Whichever way we describe and explain the "Iraq question", there can be little debate that defeating the project of colonising Iraq and frustrating Washington's occupation of the country will be critical for the fate of Iraqi people, as it would be for the people of the region. The least, and most immediate, effect that such a defeat could have is to put in question Bush's plans to extent military actions against other countries in the region. It will undermine the will of the US government to utilise force to directly and completely control Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. There can also be no doubt that the "Iraqi resistance" is the agent that can decisively impose this defeat on the US government. All the other barriers and obstacles are unlikely to have more than a minor role on the sidelines.

An important proviso needs to be made here. The defeat of the US government in its occupation of Iraq and its projected schemes for the country, however, is not necessarily the same as a victory for the Iraqi people. Defeat may not necessarily produce a better Iraq for its people, nor necessarily end tyranny, oppression, poverty, murder, or even ruination and war. The horizon opened up by the military defeat of Washington, is before all else, shaped by the force that will rise out of the resistance movement (or movements). This horizon is defined not by what is being negated, but what is at the same time being proven. For the fate of the people of Iraq, as that of the region, the nature of resistance and specifically, the politics of resistance, is as important as the existence of that resistance.

Opposition to colonialism and imperialism is not always progressive, nor of the people or even liberating. Opposition to colonialism and imperialism can find its inspiration from savagely reactionary politics, and promise a future that may be no less enslaving and debasing than the imperialist and colonialist domination that it superseded. The painful experience of the Iranian revolution should, for all time, put an end to the illusion that the anti-imperialist struggle is an alchemy which will turn copper to gold!

The departure of the occupation army, or even the defeat of the entire project of George W Bush for Iraq, will only become a victory for the people of the country and the region if it is not replaced by a reactionary and despotic

native alternative. When the resistance movement is able to institutionalise itself as a democratic and progressive substitute; combining national liberation with social liberation. The victory of the Iraqis will not emerge out of conservative ultra-right politics, whether nationalistic or religious, but from the germ cells of a revolutionary policy - one that does not turn its back to the achievements of modernity, but can and does use these achievements to transcend capitalist modernity and to create an alternative in contradistinction to it. Otherwise, any transition, will remain a despotic cycle sinking into conservative quagmire moving with ease from colonialism to religious fundamentalism and ethnic chauvinism, and thence to commodity fetishism and market fanaticism.

Multiplicity

With these points in mind, the first observation to be made is that there is no such entity as a single united "resistance". It neither has a unitary nature nor a single political leadership and direction. Indeed the most obvious quality of the anti-occupation resistance in Iraq is the existence of different ideological strains, assorted political programmes, diverse organisational structures, and incompatible means of action within them. At one extreme one can see a black and barbaric terrorism, represented by such groups as Abu Musab Zarqawi. In this extreme the border between resistance and counter-resistance is, naturally, difficult to distinguish. The atmosphere of this corner is so overflowing with intrigues that it is often impossible to distinguish the terror squads linked to Mossad and the CIA from the terrorist cells of fundamentalist Islam. Yet regardless as to whether the main player in this extreme are the security-terrorist agencies of the US and Israeli governments or the "jihadist" networks of terror and murder, the future being prepared by them is indistinguishable: a country torn apart, sunk in darkness, cruelty and hatred at one end of which the Taliban rules and the other end the warmongers in the pay of Pentagon.

Here one key point must be emphasised. To accept that "jihadi terrorism" co-exist within the ranks of the Iraqi resistance is not an excuse to exaggerate their weight or role in the general resistance. The picture painted by the imperialist media of the Iraqi resistance, by exaggerating the acts committed by such groups as Zarqawi, is at variance even with documents published by official security and military experts [10].

On the other extreme are the progressive, left and secular forces of opposition. In this quarter one can see the active presence of a number of newly set up trade unions, including the union of southern oil workers and the Basra oil workers union, the movement of unemployed workers, the movement of the destitute for housing and other livelihood demands, the movements for the equality and liberation of women, and many civil groups and societies.

Resistance here, while essentially non-armed, is also non-uniform both from the political and the ideological viewpoint. One cannot ignore the presence of a variety of different tendencies, including religious and ethnic differences, among the trade union activists and the organisers of the various movements [11]. Yet despite this, the resistance movement at this end of the spectrum looks at opening up the political atmosphere, combining the struggle against occupation with efforts to set up a power structure that faces downwards. It wants direct participation, simultaneously rejects both colonial and corporate domination, espouses resistance against the dictatorship of the market and commodity despotism. Therefore, the Iraq being born on this pole of the resistance is a different Iraq. It is an Iraq that wants to put an end to the closed circuit of dictatorship, privatisations and poverty and to present a better future to the people.

Between these two poles an assorted spectrum of political Islam, ethnic and tribal nationalists carry the main load of

November 5, 2003. www.occupationwatch.org. Maas highlights the differences between IFTU and UUI towards the workers' opposition to the anti-democratic anti-labour laws of the occupying forces.

4. See Nick Cohen, in the London Observer, "The only way of peace" March 2, 2003; and also articles by Frank Smyth including "Who are the progressives in Iraq? The Left, the Right and the Islamists?" Foreign Policy in Focus, September 21, 2004. See also the debate between Tariq Ali and Christopher Hitchens where the latter describes resistance as "the force of mediaeval tyranny" and "clerical fascism". www.democracynow.org/static/alihichens.htm; and the interesting article by Stephen E Bonner and Kurt Jacobson investigating the attitudes of left intellectuals in relation to Iraq: "Dubya's fellow travellers: Left intellectuals and Mr Bush's war". Logos. Fall 2004.

The British group Workers Liberty, the US group Militant and other left groups have similar, if a little less overt, interpretations of resistance. See for example: "A reply to the Stop the War Coalition". www.workersliberty.org/node/view/3237

5. See James Petras: "Support the Iraqi resistance movement". Rebellion, 7 April 2004. Or Waldon Bello "Empire and resistance today". Z net, June 25, 2004, or to the talk of Arundhati Roy given in San Francisco "Public power in the age of empire". Socialist Worker, September 3, 2004.

6. Waldon Bello footnote 5 *ibid* and also Rahul Mahajan "Will the anti-war movement stand up this time?" Nov 6, 2004. www.counter-punch.org.

7. To get a picture of the divisions arising out of the "Iraq question" in the

the resistance on their shoulders. This is largely an armed resistance and has developed into an all out, and continuously expanding, guerrilla war. It is probably irrefutable that, in the present junctures, this continuum carries the main weight of the general resistance against occupation and that its popular support base among ordinary people is rapidly expanding.

The terrible after effects of the actions of the occupiers on the livelihood, self respect and security of the people of Iraq has caused the "armed resistance" to be seen by an increasing sections of the people of Iraq as a reliable means of ending the occupation and the hardships arising from it. This view has been undoubtedly bolstered by the active efforts by some of these groups to fill the gap created by the collapse of the social and security net of the previous regime, particularly among the most deprived and destitute masses. The broad influence of the group led by Moqtada al-Sadr in the workers' districts of Baghdad and the recruiting of soldiers for the Mahdi Army amongst the destitute volunteers in the Sadr township are the fruits of such activities.

Despite the extreme variety in the social base of this spectrum, notwithstanding all the disagreements and rivalries between the groups that make it up, the Iraq being built by this section of the resistance has a single face: an Iraq where social and cultural conservatism has the last word. Under its shadow an Iraq ranging from a paternalistic and male-dominated populism to a naked ethnic or religious despotism is being fostered. This is an Iraq ruled by a two-headed monster: one head belongs to Ayatollah Khomeini and the other to Saddam Hussein [12].

With such a picture of the resistance one cannot be overly optimistic about the future of Iraq. The alternatives offered by the "resistance" to challenge the despots handpicked by CIA-Pentagon to the people of Iraq is strikingly polarised: at one extreme an ultra-conservative religious-ethnic dictatorship and at the other a progressive popular sovereignty relying on the extensive participation of all those who rely on their labour to live. It is clear that the defeat of the occupiers can only be considered a victory of the Iraqi people if it moves through this route of a progressive, sovereign participatory process. How else is the closed circuit of war, ashes, violence, and tyranny to subside in Iraq?

To talk of an existing forward looking worker resistance is, of course, only to highlight the possibility of a transition to such a prospect. If the realities on the ground were to remain stationary, there can be scant optimism that such a possibility will become a probability. What these realities promise for Iraq's future, is a fundamentalist reading of political enslavement and destitution. One enslavement and destitution to be substituted for another. This is a calamitous solution for a calamitous problem. What is to be done? Should one submit to the logic of the existing reality? Or find a route to escape a seemingly closed circle drawn by the imperialist-anti-imperialist reactionary cycle? The choice between bad and worse? Join the ranks of John Negroponte's "contractors" and place ones hope in the "secularism" of Iyad Alawi, or fall into line behind Moqtada Sadr and swear allegiance to his "anti-imperialism"?

Quagmire one

Let us initially dispel any optimism, or even uncertainty, regarding the future facing the people of Iraq and their country, were the occupying forces to succeed in their project. The reconstruction project is certainly not limited to taking away the right to national sovereignty. Nor is it restricted to handing over the country to "native contractors" (whether Alawi or Chalabi) or Texan and Miami governors.

Politically the reconstruction of Iraq means destroying the very basis and every potential for opposition and the abrogation of all rights to resist the plunder of the resources and wealth of the country and the enslavement of its people. Whether this is to be achieved through "vote" or "bullet" is

immaterial. No sleep will be lost over the distance between a "voting booth" and an "Abu Gharib". The colonialist-corporate reconstruction is fundamentally very flexible as to the tools it uses. Nothing is rejected a priori. Saddam's regime must obviously be destroyed, but not its materials, whether generals or "Mukhaberat" [security forces]. All are recyclable, including its laws and rules. Why not rejuvenate the anti-labour laws of 1987, ban the right to organise or strike and imprison labour activist? [13].

Sharia' laws also come in handy. Secularism is permitted only where it can be used to bombard civilians. Otherwise cultural relativism, from which the Neo-Conservatives borrow so much ideological materials for their global empire, does not close the road to compromise with the ayatollahs. Why oppose "Islamic hejab" [covering] when it can also camouflage plunder and exploitation by US multinationals, and help break down the will to resistance in some people? Or if we can get access to a barrel of oil by getting a fatwa from Ayatollah Sistani, then why not order the bars to close or even fit one rendering of sexual apartheid to today's Iraq? Ultimately why not agree to a constitution based on Islamic sharia' and Islamise your enclosure of the country?

One important point should be cleared up here. Some of the flexibility and compromises that the occupiers or their Iraqi clients have demonstrated cannot be understood outside the overall scene in which these events unfold. To turn a blind eye to one or other protest, and flexibility towards some demands (labour or other demands) can only be understood with the background of an armed struggle that is spreading.

If the armed struggle has not completely halted Washington's efforts to 'restructure' Iraq politically and economically, it has certainly slowed it down considerably. The destruction of the armed struggle is at this moment pivotal. The least cost for the occupiers is some flexibility towards social forces who have chosen the non-armed road to resistance. Some political concessions are in order. If those in receipt of concessions agree to cooperate with the occupation forces, and in particular back the suppression of the armed struggle, they might even pocket a part of the "blood money".

The giving over of some executive positions to the leaders of the Communist party of Iraq, or the recognition of the trade union linked to this party (IFTU) is a price the Pentagon and CIA are prepared to pay for their support in repressing the resistance [14]. With the defeat of the armed resistance, assuming that is achievable, and the acceleration of the "neo-construction" (read total and complete plunder of Iraq) flexibility, compromise and concessions would lose their necessity as a tactic.

Clearly the colonial route will not create an Iraq tolerable for the majority of its population. Forget the promises of progress, welfare, freedom, democracy, or civilisation. A minimum livelihood, the most basic health care, even the rationed tea and sugar of the old regime, free water, affordable electricity, or a mere roof over your head in the informal townships in urban outskirts will be a dream.

The prospect promised the people of Iraq by this quagmire is the removal of general ownership and the enslavement of the majority of the population: Kurd or Arab, Shi'a or Sunni. History will not forgive the political force that fails to see this. For the political force that participates in dragging Iraq into this destiny and helps the occupation army and its client government in the colonialist reconstruction of the country, the least punishment that awaits it is dissolution. By signing into this policy, groups such as the CPI show either ignorance or treachery.

Quagmire two

The road to the liberation of the people of Iraq is resistance to occupation and the total defeat of the project to colonise their country. There is no way to circumvent such a road and no one should entertain doubt about its

October meeting visit these sites:

www.workersliberty.org,
www.cpgb.org.uk
www.iraqoccupationfocus.org,
and also Sami Ramadani's letter, this issue.

8. For an analysis of the roots of current developments see: Istvan Mészáros, "Socialism or barbarism; from the American Century to the cross roads". Monthly Review Press, 2001.

9. See the highly readable account of Stephen Zunes, "The US invasion of Iraq: The military side of globalisation?" October 20, 2004
www.commondreams.org/vIEWS04/020-28.htm

10. See for example the report by Peter Ester and Tom Squitieri, "Data suggest administration has overstated the role of jihadist in the insurgency" USA Today, July 6, 2004. Also Mark Mazzeti, "Insurgents are mostly Iraqis, US military says". Los Angeles Times, September 28, 2004.

11. See the readable account by Ewa Jasiewicz, "Internal intifada: workers' struggle in occupied Iraq" MA Interactive Art & Design, Issue 28.

12. See among others the detailed report by Nir Rosen, "Inside the Iraqi resistance: Part 1-7, Asia Times, July 15, 2004.

13. Sami Ramadani's series of articles in The Guardian (London) and Ewa Jasiewicz, Iraq diaries, www.electroniciraq.net

14. See Sami Ramadani's letter to Alex Gordon - ibid footnote 3.

15. See Nir Rosen ibid footnote 12. Also Naomi Klein, "You cannot bomb beliefs". The Nation, October 18, 2004. Also various communiqués by Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq that appear in the site of WCPI including the latest on October 25, 2005 entitled "Criminal Acts Committed by Islamists during months of Ramadan against the

women of Iraq”.

16. For some organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party (UK), support for an anti-imperialist united front to end the occupation has become official policy. Some leading and progressive analysts on the left have also, indirectly supported this stance. Among these is James Petras, who by diluting or passing over the influence of Islamic fundamentalism in the resistance movement and the danger facing the future of Iraqi society from this quarter, makes the assumption that the anti-imperialist resistance in Iraq has a homogeneous nature. He considers the road open for the building of a single front. While Petras correctly emphasises the importance of the resistance against occupation, he believes the danger of Islamic fundamentalism as portrayed by some US commentators a result of their self-centred views. He adds that anyone who struggles for self-emanicipation but does not completely follow “western democratic values” is seen, from their view, as “fundamentalist” and “terrorist”. While I agree with Petras’s overall criticism of US intellectuals, in this particular instance I believe he is mistaken. The issue is as follows: Islamic fundamentalism, rather than rejecting “western democratic values”, is attached to the values of political Islam. These are values from the inside of which only a mediaeval political despotism and a stone age society can emerge. See James Petras footnote 5, *ibid*.

17. Even such distinguished analysts as Naomi Klein sadly join in painting such a depressing picture. She writes “Even under the least scenario, the current choice in Iraq is not between Sadr’s dangerous fundamentalism and a secular democratic government made up of trade unionists and feminists. It is between open elections ... which risk handing power to fundamentalism but would also allow secular and moderate religious forces to organise ... and rigged elections designed to leave the county in the hands of Iyad Alawi and the rest of his CIA/Mukhaberat-trained thugs ...”. See footnote 16 *ibid*. Accordingly the choice is not only limited to Alawi and Sadr, but its means is elections organised by the occupation army. The surrender to real politics, no matter how minor, when facing a situation like the “Iraq question” with its roots deep in the contradictions and crisis of global capital, can drive even the most radical activists on the left into a policy of inaction. This is a



As bad as each other?: liberation and democracy, US-style

correctness. But a resistance from the innards of which a fundamentalist-ethnicist movement arises cannot clear such a road. The correctness of this analysis is also beyond doubt.

Logical deductions aside, palpable realities tell us the same. Just consider recent events in Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan and countless other countries. If this is not enough then the current and direct experience of the people of Iraq is salutary. Wherever the Islamist have gained control they have built a small model of their ideal Iraq. This is an Iraq where Islamic courts have set up benches for whipping and hatchets for cutting off limbs, completed by compulsory hejab [veil], limitations on women working and gender violence. Where the showing of “western” films and other appearances of western culture are banned, and the murder of communist and socialist opponents has begun. Thousands of gypsies have been expelled from their homes, including from the Sadr township and homosexuals are being chased and punished. A journalist reports that in a neighbourhood controlled by the “jihadis” in Faluja to drink water by the left hand, used for washing after toiletting, has been classed as against sharia’ and punishable [15].

Political Islam and racist nationalism are part of the “Iraq problem” not part of its solution. If any of these ultra-conservative movements were to lay hands on political power, the Iraqi people will be submerged in ethnic and religious hatred, the Iraqi workers and working people will be splintered. Iraq will sink into massacres, aggression and war, cultural, social and psychological collapse. The class and human solidarity among the mass of the people will be destroyed. This, ultimately, is tantamount to falling on ones knees in front of imperialist powers and before the rule of corporations.

One can stand up to imperialist occupation, and even end it with political Islam or ethnic nationalism but one cannot not build a liberationist alternative in its place. Political Islam and ethnic nationalism may appear to be an answer to capitalist darkness, tyranny and barbarism at the dawn of the 21st Century, but this is a desperate response that is equally dark, tyrannous and barbaric. Armed with these ideologies one can well pass the gates of death and martyrdom but to enter a better life or a more human society? Alas

never!

The fundamentalist resistance is a road to nowhere. Imperialist occupation and the dangers of a rabid colonialism should not prevent us from seeing this reality. One cannot, in the name of the primacy of the anti-imperialist struggle, in the name of the priority of liberation from the claws of the occupying forces, ignore the danger that will emerge from inside the current crisis and rapidly multiply. It is even worse to take recourse to an artificial staging, separating tasks into “main” and “subsidiary”, and enter into a united front or a tactical alliance with political Islam and ethnic nationalism [16].

Even though 25 years have passed from the experience of Iran, and even though Iraq today is in many ways different from the Iran of revolutionary days, yet that experience can still provide many useful lessons to socialists and communists and all the progressive forces of Iraq. Khomeinism did not achieve power in Iran because the left was negligent in the battle to overthrow the Shah, but on the contrary, among others because the left could not, or would not, see the danger of the Islamist movement that in the course of the struggle against the Shah was growing. The left failed to look for solutions to reign it in. After a quarter of a century, the Iranian left (even ignoring those sections which supported the Islamic movement and allied or colluded with the Islamic government and thereby were essentially annihilated) has not recovered from the severe blows consequent to this error.

The third way

For the people of Iraq neither colonialism nor fundamentalism are a choice or a predetermined fate. If we were to examine both the potentials and needs of the people of Iraq, below the surface of the current conditions we will arrive at nothing less than a third outlook. This gives the vista of a progressive, popular and democratic resistance movement. And a secular left that takes a lead in its formation. The germs of such a movement are already there. But to move beyond this stage, to be an agent of historic transformation in the political life of Iraq, that left has to step into an ideological and political battle of great complexity and difficulty. It needs to navigate some difficult obstacles. This is an act which in addition to self confidence, optimism and daring requires that the secular left:

a. Categorically rejects a picture that divides the Iraqi political scene, with a reactionary equatorial-line, into two murky hemispheres. Undoubtedly the secular presence is pale, and in some ways even marginal. But that presence is also undeniable. To limit political choice between Iyad Alawi and Moqtada Sadr not only fails to describe the real potentials of this society, but even underestimates present realities [17].

But even supposing that there were no signs of a progressive anti-imperialist force in the political arena of the country, such a force has to be created. The absence of such a force does not mean that the Iraqi people have no need for a secular resistance, a political project with freedom, equality and self government of the people as its goal. This requisite is even more acute in today's historic situation when two reactionary and ruinous forces are threatening the very existence of Iraq. This task cannot, and must not, be left unanswered in the name of "realism" or "pragmatism".

b. The present political scene is not a preordained historic destiny. It can be, and must be, overturned. When a form of dual, or even multiple, government is in existence, and the balance of power is such that a final consolidation is way off, the secular and anti-imperialist left has a golden opportunity. This is an occasion for it to realise its class and social potentials and bring them out into the social arena.

At a time when common rationality is calling for expediency, the left cannot turn its back to its political principles and moral values. The emergence of an intense ethnic-religious reaction from within the anti-imperialist resistance is today a fact. It will be disastrous, however, if this reality causes the secular and progressive left to waver in pursuing the anti-imperialist and anti-occupation struggle. Iraq's future will be shaped by the counter-balance between the power of the imperialist occupier and the force of the anti-imperialist resistance. The left cannot abandon a struggle that will engineer the future of Iraq. To go on talking about equality and freedom, while pulling back from confrontation while people are being crushed under the boots of a colonialist army, is tantamount to shunting the people along one road alone: take shelter with the ayatollahs, sheikhs and Saddam's generals.

Moreover, concerns over the growing influence and authority of the fundamentalist movement, no matter how justified, is no reason for the secular left to have any hesitation in defending the right of each Iraqi citizen, regardless of religion or politics, to throw out the occupying army from their home and town. Or worse, to close one's eyes even for a second in the face of bombing and rocketing of towns and villages and the pitiless massacre of defenceless people. It is an unforgivable mistake to ignore the removal of political and civil rights, or turn a blind eye to the arrest and torture of those who participate in or support the resistance (even those who when in power will have no hesitation in ordering the mass execution of the left). Through presenting a red copy of a black reaction, the left will never become an alternative [18].

And finally the resistance struggle should not be limited to confronting the military occupation or direct political control. The corporate occupation of Iraq, its economic occupation, should not be allowed to slowly creep ahead [19]. Paul Bremner former US governor of Iraq had promulgated some 100 orders that began what he named the economic reconstruction (in reality neo-construction) of Iraq. He gave primacy to the privatisation by handing over 200 state-owned companies, that is to say almost the entire Iraqi economy, into 100% ownership of US corporations. The freeing of commerce, the removal of the banking system from state control and abrogation of labour regulations have all the same aim of breaking up native structures in an unequal competition. Capital can move freely and labour can be exploited unfettered. They have also made every effort to ensure that the process is irre-

versible. By ensuring a 40-year credit for the contracts and other arrangements Bremner has closed all legal loopholes for a revision or halting this project [20]. Even the "transfer of power", whether by appointment or elections, is a means of putting a stamp of approval in the name of the people of Iraq to the contracts that the US ambassador had out into effect, and to speed up and secure the economic occupation of Iraq.

Undoubtedly the resistance of industrial workers, especially those working in state-owned companies who are the first victims of the Bush's plan for the economic "reconstruction" of Iraq, is vital to challenge this project. Yet, unless such a resistance spreads to the entire labour force it will not necessarily succeed. A resistance against the corporate occupation of Iraq can mobilise all those who face increasing poverty and destitution - from peasant to non-industrial proletariat and to the unemployed and semi-employed, and unite them under one common umbrella, and give them solidarity in a nationwide struggle.

To stand up against neo-construction, particularly by those who have been taken to the brink of a major human catastrophe by exposure to 12 years of economic sanctions and nearly 2 years of war, occupation and ruin is of course something immensely difficult and complicated. In today's Iraq the resources are predominantly under the control of Negroponte and Bechtel, Chevron, Haliburton and ... are the biggest bosses in the land. Little is left even of the meagre economic security net of the previous regime for poor Iraqis and the last haven for those who have nothing but their labour power to sell is lost. In such conditions unless the resistance against economic occupation (neo-construction) is combined with a struggle for survival, its spread among the masses of the destitute faces difficulties. Indeed it is the occupying capital, that in the presence of a huge and frustrated reserve army of labour, is not only capable of getting its hands on all the workers it needs for its economy, but enough hungry volunteers to fill the ranks of its colonialist army.

It follows that to expand the resistance movement into this realm requires that we help create a chain of socio-economic movements and struggles that answer the immediate needs of the mass of the people outside the sphere of control of the corporations and the state, and outside commodity and market relations. These have already begun to take place in today's Iraq as shown by the occupation an independent management of production and service institutions, the emergence of mass consumer movements, the setting up of mutual assistance funds, volunteer systems of urban services, assistance in providing food, clothing medicines and such like.

These experiences are not just responses to immediate needs and the question of survival in the anti-occupation resistance, but give us a schema of a social system that can become a progressive replacement for the ultra-conservative colonial or fundamentalist alternatives.

And finally the anti-occupation resistance must in a real sense move outside the borders of Iraq and become global. The aims and consequences of the occupation of Iraq are neither confined to one country or even a particular region. The occupation of Iraq is part of a widespread assault to enslave totally and completely the people of our planet. This is what the most reactionary and aggressive poles of global capital has embarked on. The project of the global American empire is a serious threat against all the peoples of this world. And to confront it is also a global task. In a global struggle against the occupation of Iraq and against the global conquering project of the White House the presence of left and anti capitalist forces is essential. Not only because this is central to the creation of a historic-global agent to counter the danger of barbarism, but also because the forces on the left are equally crucial to block the growth of ultra-conservative religious-ethnic and national-chauvinistic movements.

bitter reality that we unfortunately have to accept.

18. Mahmood Ketabchi, whose views are close to that of the W-CPI, when criticising the Socialist Workers Party's condemnation of US invasion of Iraq, points argues that the defeat of Iraq at the hands of the "Iraqi resistance" is tantamount to the country falling into an intolerable hell, and thus indirectly supports the continuation of the occupation. See footnote 1, *ibid*.

19. See the interesting article by Antonio Juhasz, "Military action may have ended, but corporate invasion has taken over". May 19, 2003 www.progressive.org.

20. Stephen Zunes footnote 9 *ibid*.