

Peace Is Patriotic, And That's The Problem

An anarchist perspective

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Contents

War on Iraq	3
War on the Poor	4
Struggle	5
Anarchists... What we stand for	6

“We Americans claim to be a peace-loving people. We hate bloodshed; we are opposed to violence. Yet we go into spasms of joy over the possibility of projecting dynamite bombs from flying machines upon helpless citizens. We are ready to hang, electrocute, or lynch anyone, who, from economic necessity, will risk his own life in the attempt upon that of some industrial magnate. Yet our hearts swell with pride at the thought that America is becoming the most powerful nation on earth, and that it will eventually plant her iron foot on the necks of all other nations. Such is the logic of patriotism.”

— Emma Goldman, 1911

War on Iraq

We have to be absolutely clear about this war: the US government is attacking Iraq, not because of any threat of “weapons of mass destruction” nor out of concern for democracy or human rights in Iraq. The US government was on good terms with Iraq from 1984 to 1990. Throughout this period they helped to build up Iraq as a military power in the region, giving the Iraqi government technical assistance and weapons. During the Iran/Iraq war (1980–1988) approximately 60,000 Iranian soldiers and civilians were exposed to Iraqi chemical weapons¹. In 1988, the Iraqi government killed thousands of people when it used chemical weapons against Kurdish rebels, and entire Kurdish villages. Nevertheless, the US continued to supply Saddam with weapons and assistance, even after such brutality². Even after the Gulf War (1990–1991) the US didn’t much care about the brutality of the Iraqi government. In March of 1991, after Iraqi troops were driven out of Kuwait, there was an uprising of Shi’a Muslims in southern Iraq, against Saddam’s government. The US and its allies simply watched as Iraqi ground troops crushed this revolt.³ If any further proof were needed that the US government has no interest in democracy and human rights in the Middle East, we could simply look at the regimes that it supports in the region. The great US ally, Saudi Arabia, is a monarchy. In Saudi Arabia, independent political parties and trade unions are banned, the local media is tightly censored and there is legal discrimination against women⁴. Israel, the largest recipient of US aid in the world, is actively pursuing genocidal policies against the Palestinian people, occupying their land, forcing them into ghettos, repressing expressions of Palestinian culture, ruining the Palestinian economy, jailing and torturing Palestinian political activists and terrorizing the Palestinian population with harassment and assaults by the Israeli Defense Forces.⁵

The war has nothing whatsoever to do with human rights, democracy or “weapons of mass destruction”. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, after Saudi Arabia. It has the potential to produce millions of barrels of oil a day. As the world’s oil supplies dwindle, the US government wants to make sure that it has a firm hold on the Middle East, and its oil.⁶ By

¹ “Iran: The Legacy of chemical weapons” by Doug Schwartz www.foreignwire.com

² “When US turned a blind eye to poison gas” by Dilip Hiro. Daily Observer, September 1, 2002. www.observer.co.uk

³ “Why Another War? A backgrounder on the Iraq Crisis” by Sarah Graham-Brown and Chris Toensing. From Middle East Research & Information Project. October, 2002.

⁴ “Saudi Arabia: A Secret State of Suffering” by Amnesty International www.amnesty.org

⁵ “The New Intifada: Resisting Israeli Apartheid”. Ed. Roane Carey. New York: Verso, 2001.

⁶ see [3]

conquering Iraq, the US can assure that the regime that follows will be loyal to the US, that it will increase the oil production and that US companies will profit off the flow of that oil.

Also, war itself is good business. The big corporations that manufacture weapons, are given defense contracts by the government worth billions of dollars. The US government thus provides the arms industry with a guaranteed market for its products. In most cases, the effects of defense spending subsidize whole areas of the economy. Boeing, which is the second largest recipient of Pentagon contracts, can use that money on its civilian aircraft as well. In fact, war is such good business, that the US has not shut down a single major weapons production line since the end of the Cold War, and continues to spend over \$300 billion a year on “defense”. For these companies, more war means more profits. In this way, the defense industry has a vested interest in promoting aggression on the part of the US government, which they do, among other things, by making generous campaign donations to both the Democrats and the Republicans⁷.

War on the Poor

Another effect of war is that political dissidents who oppose the war can be labeled as disloyal or unpatriotic. One response to this can be seen in the placards, posters and bumper-stickers all over the country, proclaiming such things as “Peace is Patriotic” and “Regime Change Begins at home, Vote”. They attempt to legitimize resistance to the war, within certain acceptable channels. This response to war is fundamentally flawed.

The problem is that what we have when there is not a declared “war” going on, can hardly be described as “peace”. Almost half the world’s population lives on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 a day-70% of whom are women. The richest 1% of people receives as much income as the poorest 57%⁸. Worldwide, 100 million people are homeless and 1 billion have only inadequate, temporary or insecure shelter. In the United States, 2 million people will be homeless at some point during the year, and 700,000 are homeless on any given night⁹. This massive poverty is not an accident that will be done away with in time, but a very real product of the way our economic and political institutions are set up.

Under a capitalist economy, the right of private property is protected, and things are produced in order to make a profit. This means that the land, the factories and the infrastructure of society are centralized in the hands of a small number of rich businessmen (and women). Under capitalism, the economic decisions-the decisions about what to make, how much and for whom-are made by the rich who own the economy, in order to make a profit for themselves. People are homeless quite simply, because it is not profitable to make houses for them. People starve because it is not profitable to make food for people who cannot buy it. Capitalism literally creates poverty by depriving the poor of the things they need, so that they can then be exploited as a source of cheap labor. When a landlord forces their tenants into the street, in order to raise the

⁷ “Military-Industrial Complex Revisited: How Weapons Makers are shaping US foreign and military policy” by William D. Hartung. From Foreign Policy in Focus. www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org “Restraining the Growth of the U.S. Defense Budget” by Michael E. O’Hanlon. From Foreign Policy Studies, February 2002. www.brook.edu

⁸ “About Global Poverty and Microcredit” from PBS online. www.pbs.org “Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a fragmented world” by United Nations Development Programme. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. www.undp.org

⁹ “A roof is not enough: a look at homelessness worldwide” by Monte Leach. From Share International Archives www.shareintl.org

rent, that is an attack. When people are injured or die in unsafe working conditions because it is cheaper for their boss, that is an attack. When people are made poor and then forced to spend their entire lives working for rich people, just to get by, that is an attack. Capitalism itself is warfare—a war of the rich and powerful against the poor and exploited.

In this war, the government is on the side of the rich. It gives massive subsidies to the rich (through Pentagon contracts, for example). It manipulates the flow of people, goods and money across its borders to ensure profitability. And, most importantly, it uses violence to defend the interests of the rich. In Iraq—as in Afghanistan before it—the government uses war to defend the interests of the rich investors in oil and arms corporations who profit from weapons contracts and increased access to oil resources. In Colombia (and the rest of Northern South America) the US government is funding a massive military build-up, in order to eliminate the organized resistance to further capitalist development in the region (the Marxist guerillas and radical associations of the indigenous people and the poor coca-growers). Indeed capitalism became the dominant economic system of the globe because of the cheap cotton produced by the forced enslavement of Africans, and the cheap land stolen as European states perpetrated a series of genocides against the indigenous people of the Americas.

Of course it is patriotic to defend the “peace” that existed before the war on Iraq. But it is a somewhat ridiculous position, because it is impossible to separate the government, to which one is being loyal and patriotic, from the economic and political system that causes war. The state and ultimately state violence is the glue, which holds capitalism together. And at those times when there is not massive state violence going on, such as a war, capitalism continues to displace, oppress and exploit the poor. For these reasons, we must oppose both capitalist war, and capitalist “peace”.

Struggle

To want an end to war is of course a worthwhile goal, but in order to really achieve such a goal, we must have a clear idea of where war comes from. The cry to oppose the war by being patriotic, standing up for “what America really stands for” and voting for a different set of politicians, is merely the voice of a different section of the ruling class speaking—the voice of the liberal exploiters, who dress up exploitation in progressive rhetoric. When people are being made poor, when they are having their housing taken away or being brutalized by the police, when the government is murdering people to make money for investors, people will resist. That resistance may be angry and uncontrolled. It may be rioting. It may not fit nicely into the political channels designed by the rich and powerful. Nevertheless, it is with this real struggle that we must stand in solidarity. Those who would call for electoral or patriotic responses to war are only serving to marginalize those who are already resisting.

We anarchists want an end to war, too. Wars kill poor people and increase exploitation and misery, while the rich profit. But we don’t have any illusions that we are fighting for “the freedom that America really stands for”, and we stand in open solidarity with the front lines of resistance across the world. The war on Iraq fits in with a long history of colonization, brutality and aggression on the part of the US government. Frankly, we are enemies of government, and the US government especially. We want a world without borders and bureaucrats, without police and politicians. To struggle for such a world, is to oppose the long intertwined history of state vio-

lence and capitalist oppression-it is to oppose the war against the poor. And unlike wars between nations, there can be no peace between classes. So long as the rich exist as a class, profiting off the forced exploitation and misery of the poor, it is meaningless to talk of peace. Only through an organized, determined struggle on the part of the poor and exploited against their exploiters can we hope to bring about an end to exploitation. This struggle is not a game, and does not fit nicely into the rules of the proper, patriotic, political channels. In fact, it is ultimately a struggle against them as well.

Anarchists... What we stand for

Anarchism: The word “anarchy” comes from Greek and means “no rulers”. As a political philosophy, anarchism is based on the idea that organization does not require rulers-that people can get together and deal with all the problems facing them, without an authority directing them. Only for those who think that the only way to organize is to have a boss giving orders, does “anarchy” mean “chaos”.

1. We are opposed to capitalism. The economic system based on private property and production for a profit literally creates poverty by depriving the poor of the means of subsistence. The poor are then exploited by the rich as a source of cheap labor. As long as there is capitalism, there will be poverty, misery and exploitation.
2. We are opposed to colonialism. Capitalism was founded on the profits reaped from African slaves and the stolen land of the indigenous people of the Americas. This brutal dispossession, subordination and exploitation or elimination of entire peoples continues today. The colonized people are everywhere among the poorest and most exploited.
3. We are opposed to white supremacy. While rarely explicitly advocated anymore, the systematic privileging of white people over people of color is a structural aspect of the society in which we live. This structural racism exists globally and locally and means that the rich and powerful tend to be white people, while the poorest and most exploited are people of color.
4. We are opposed to patriarchy. Across the globe there exists a structural sexism that gives men more access to wealth and power while creating conditions in which women are impoverished, exploited and brutalized. Everywhere, women are among the poorest workers, and much of the work that women do is unpaid.
5. We are opposed to police. The vast majority of crimes are caused by poverty and could be eliminated by doing away with poverty. Putting people in prison is a way to control rebellious poor people as well as a way to exploit their labor. The police and the army are the physical violence of the state. They exist to keep the poor and oppressed in their place. They serve and protect only the rich and their interests.
6. We are opposed to war. Wars are fought to expand empires and to protect the interests of the rich in one country. Those who suffer and die are the poor in all countries involved. Nevertheless, we are not pacifists, and uphold the right of people to resist oppression violently if necessary.

7. We are opposed to borders. Borders are artificial barriers that divide us and facilitate our exploitation. They allow the rich and their investments to pass easily, while impeding the free movement of people. They allow empires to extend rights and privileges only to the border, while extending exploitation across the globe. Borders are the inhuman laws that allow humans to be labeled “illegal” and exploited as cheap labor.
8. We want economic equality. We want libertarian communism. We want the land and the means of production and distribution held in common. We want work to be geared toward fulfilling the needs of the community and controlled by those doing the work. We want the means of subsistence guaranteed to those who cannot work.
9. We want political freedom. We want a stateless society-a society without rulers and ruled. We want political institutions created out of free association and not coercion. We want autonomy and self-government for all peoples and for all people.
10. We want human dignity. We want the means of development provided to all. We want a classless society, where cultures and people are free to define themselves and interact as equals. We want inter-personal, local, regional and global solidarity and mutual aid.
11. We need a revolution. We realize that those who profit off of misery will do everything in their power to maintain the world as it is, and the road ahead will be filled with battles. But only by fighting these battles, only through struggle on the part of the poor and exploited, against their exploiters can we ever hope to bring about an end to exploitation.

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