Statement of the Spartacist League/Britain

US/British occupiers out of Iraq now!

Imperialist hands off Iran!

Iran's seizure of 15 British army and naval personnel on 23 March brought forth a barrage of patriotic chauvinism against Iran, a country which has recently been subject to repeated provocations by the imperialists. With consummate hypocrisy, spokesmen for the Blair government shrieked that Iran was lying when it said the marines and sailors were apprehended inside Iranian territorial waters and howled about "coercion" and "humiliation" of the prisoners, some of whom were shown on Iranian television making statements supporting the Iranian government's claim. Almost two weeks after they were captured by Iranian forces, the British sailors and marines were released by the Tehran regime.

We do not know what the British forces were up to at the time of their capture, but we do know that the imperialists are the aggressors and this semi-colonial country is in their crosshairs. The monstrous hue and cry over the captured British crew members can only serve to heighten the danger of an imperialist attack on Iran. Moreover, Britain's defence of its marines and sailors — that they were not in Iranian but Iraqi waters — was premised on their role as overlords in Iraq, which has been subjugated by the murderous imperialist occupation. Irrespective of where the British forces were when they were apprehended, we say: ***British, US and all imperialist troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan! Down with imperialist war provocations against Iran!***

Even while screaming about Iranian "lies", the British capitalist press could barely bring itself to report that there is no agreed boundary between Iraq and Iran for most of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The fact that an imperialist search party patrols the area at all times — sometimes led by the British and sometimes by the US — is a consequence of the occupation of Iraq. The stretch of Iraqi coast that lies at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway runs close to two strategic Iraqi oil terminals — Basra and Chaur al-Amaja — which are regarded by the Iraqi capitalist rulers as the country's "crown jewels". The boundary that is proclaimed today by the British was arbitrarily drawn — like the border of Iraq — by the British imperialists themselves!

Imperialist lies about "weapons of mass destruction" served as a pretext for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 which has led to the deaths of countless thousands of Iraqis, including through hideous imperialist massacres such as at Fallujah and Haditha, in addition to unleashing communalist slaughter on a mass scale. Today it is an open secret that the US and British imperialists have staged numerous provocations in the hope that Iranian retaliation would serve as a pretext for an attack on Iran. They have been steadily beefing up military forces in and around the Persian Gulf: two US aircraft carriers have been positioned near the Iranian coast and *BBC News* online (20 February) reported that the US has readied plans for attacks on Iran, to be triggered either by "confirmation that Iran was developing a nuclear weapon" or "a high-casualty attack on US forces in neighbouring Iraq…if it were traced directly back to Tehran". And it's not just the Americans. Liberal journalist Robert Fisk reported that: "The Iranian security services are convinced that the British security services are trying to provoke the Arabs of Iran's Khuzestan province to rise up against the Islamic Republic" (*Independent*, 2 April).

On 11 January, American troops seized five Iranians who even Iraqi officials maintained were diplomats. According to Patrick Cockburn in the *Independent* (3 April), this raid was in fact a botched attempt to abduct two senior Iranian officials — the deputy head of the Iranian National Security Council, Mohammed Jafari, and General Minojahar Frouzanda, the intelligence chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, during an official visit to Iraqi Kurdistan. Cockburn says the operation was "somewhat as if Iran had tried to kidnap the heads of the CIA and MI6 while they were on an official visit", and that Britain should have expected Iran to retaliate. A *New Yorker* online article (25 February) by Seymour Hersh quoted a former senior intelligence official saying that "the word went out last August for the military to snatch as many Iranians in Iraq as they can" and a former National Security Council official told Hersh: "This is all part of the campaign of provocative steps to increase the pressure on Iran. The idea is that at some point the Iranians will respond and then the Administration will have an open door to strike at them."

Iran needs nuclear weapons to defend itself

As revolutionary opponents of British imperialism we unequivocally condemn all imperialist war provocations against Iran. The biggest threat to the working people and oppressed of the entire world is US imperialism and its slavish toady, blood-soaked British imperialism. War moves against Iran to date include the UN Security Council's demand in December, at the behest of Washington, that Tehran halt its uranium enrichment programme and the imposition of a first round of sanctions on Iran. This came after almost three years of inspections in which the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found no evidence of a nuclear weapons programme. We vehemently oppose the imperialist sanctions against Iran, which are the opening shots in a war, as the case of Iraq demonstrates. One and a half million people were killed and the country devastated by the United Nations sanctions against Iraq which preceded the US/British invasion and occupation. Since its inception at the end of WWI — when it was called the

League of Nations — the purpose of the UN has always been to serve as a fig leaf for naked imperialist aggression against semi-colonial countries.

We insist that in the context of threats by the nuclear-armed imperialists, Iran desperately needs nuclear weapons and adequate delivery systems to defend itself. In today's world, possession of nuclear arms has become the only real measure of national sovereignty. In the event of military attack against Iran by US/British imperialism, or by Israel — the only nuclear-armed country in the Near East — or by any other force operating as proxy for the imperialists, our stand as Marxists is one of revolutionary defensism: for the military defence of Iran against imperialist attack without giving an iota of political support to the reactionary Tehran regime.

With breathtaking hypocrisy, British government spokesmen shrieked in high dudgeon about Iran's "coercion" of the 15 prisoners (often described as "hostages"), who for their part admitted being in Iranian waters and apologised. The images shown on Iranian TV, including of Leading Seaman Faye Turney wearing an Islamic headscarf, while smoking a cigarette, bore no comparison to the pictures of brutal torture and abject humiliation suffered by prisoners of the British and US imperialist forces in Iraq, who have sacks over their heads, duck tape over their mouths and are routinely beaten, forced into "stress positions", and the rest. British complaints about treatment of prisoners are particularly obscene in view of the case of Iraqi hotel worker Baha Mousa, who was arrested in 2003 and died at the hands of his British captors. Mousa was "attacked over a 36-hour period while handcuffed and hooded and suffered 93 separate injuries" (*Guardian*, 15 February), while the soldiers involved were exonerated of his murder.

Indeed the Iranian treatment of the British military captives, as seen on TV, looked positively humane in comparison with the treatment of those in Britain who find themselves on the receiving end of the racist "war on terror". None of the British naval personnel suffered the fate of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, who was not even taken prisoner but gunned down in cold blood on the London Underground in July 2005; nor of Abdul Kahar who was shot and injured during a police "anti-terrorism" raid on his home in East London in June 2006. One Muslim of Algerian origin who was detained under anti-terrorism legislation in December 2001 languished in jail for years without any charges and is now subject to a form of house arrest known as a "control order", recently told the *Guardian* (28 March) that in Blair's Britain, "I have fewer rights than an animal".

While liberals and reformists plead with Blair not to attack Iran and call for troops out of Iraq, their bottom line is to support "our boys". Thus the Stop the War Coalition (StWC), dominated by the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), posted a web statement (undated) headlined "Don't attack Iran" which opened with: "We urge the speedy release and return to this country of the detained sailors and marines." While it is appropriate to call for the release of the Iranian diplomats seized by US forces in Iraq, it is quite another thing for purported leftists to call for the release of their "own" imperialist forces in the Near East. These captives are not civilian hostages, but military personnel for whom being captured goes with the territory. For the StWC, however, such displays of flagrant social-chauvinism are par for the course. The purpose of this "anti-war movement" was not to wage class struggle for the overthrow of the capitalist system which breeds war, but to unite the maximum forces possible on a programme of bourgeois pacifism, lulling anti-war protesters with the absurd lie that capitalist "democracy" is the road to peace. The political perspective of the StWC is to pressure Blair to "break with Bush", in other words it simply advocates an alternative foreign policy for British imperialism — one more independent of the US.

The bloody legacy of British imperialism

The British press bemoans the fact that all layers of Iranian society loathe and despise British imperialism which is widely dubbed as "little Satan" to the "great Satan" in the US. This hatred stems not only from the Blair government's role in the brutal occupation of Iraq, but from British imperialism's historic role in Iran when it was the world's leading power. Today, all the belly-aching in the capitalist press cannot disguise the fact that Britain is now a senile imperialist power that is totally dependent on US imperialism to police its own interests abroad.

The fact that British imperialism is hated in Iran ***in its own right*** gives the lie to the reformists' claim that the main problem with British imperialism is its "special relationship" with the US. The present bloody mess in the Near East is the legacy of the carnage, savagery and "divide-and-rule" machinations of British imperialism when it was the dominant world power. For over a hundred years British imperialism has sought to appropriate for itself access to Iran's oil wealth. The modern oil giant BP began as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, in which the British government bought a 50 per cent stake in 1913. Over the ensuing decades Britain engineered a number of "regime changes" and in 1941 invaded the country and occupied the oil region in the south. (Meanwhile the Soviet Army entered the north and helped establish the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan.)

When the nationalist government of Mohammad Mossadeq, elected in 1951, proposed to nationalise Iran's oil, the Labour government of Clement Attlee imposed a naval blockade in the Gulf and asked the UN to condemn Iran (which it refused to do). The British hatched a plot to overthrow Mossadeq but lacked the wherewithal to carry it out, until they could persuade the CIA to take it over. Mossadeq was toppled and replaced by the brutal rule of the Shah. This history illustrates that the bloody carnage wrought by the US and British rulers in Iraq today is not some aberration from the "democratic" norm, but the everyday workings of imperialism which in the pursuit of profits is driven to strive for domination of markets and spheres of influence. This, and not a misguided foreign policy, is what drives the imperialist powers to wage war.

For a socialist federation of the Near East!

The reactionary 1979 Iranian "Islamic Revolution" that overthrew the CIA-backed Shah was supported by the bulk of the left internationally in the name of "anti-imperialism". This included the pro-Moscow Tudeh (Masses) party in Iran, which had a base among the country's strategic, heavily Arab oil workers. Uniquely on the left, the International Communist League (then the international Spartacist tendency) gave no political support to Ayatollah Khomeini's forces. We said: "Down with the Shah! Don't bow to Khomeini! For workers revolution in Iran!" After taking power, the mullahs enslaved women in the veil, slaughtered thousands of leftists and trade unionists and intensified

repression against Kurds and other minorities, as we said they would.

While the bulk of the "left" howled along with the imperialists against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, we said, "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" In a 1982 article, "Iran and Permanent Revolution" we wrote:

> "Afghanistan embodies all of the backward wretchedness of Iran — the tyranny of the landlords, khans, money lenders and mullahs — but without the internal social resources (i.e., a modern industrial proletariat) for its own emancipation. The Red Army intervention not only poses the military defense of the social gains of the October Revolution against an imperialist-backed counterrevolution on the southern border of the USSR. It also poses the extension of those gains to the oppressed Afghan peoples. The crime of the Kremlin bureaucrats would be to capitulate to world imperialism (as Stalin did in Azerbaijan in 1946) and withdraw the Red Army, thereby turning Afghanistan over to the tribal chiefs, the CIA and Khomeini and his ilk."
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> — *Spartacist*, English language edition, no 33, Spring 1982

The Kremlin did treacherously withdraw Soviet forces in 1988-89, which was the opening for the victory of imperialist-backed counterrevolution throughout Eastern Europe and within the Soviet Union itself. This historic defeat for the world proletariat has brought devastation to the working people of those societies and emboldened the imperialists in their attacks globally while fuelling the resurgence of religious reaction throughout the world.

Iran today is a cauldron of discontent, among students, women, trade unionists and national minorities. Its reactionary president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is an anti-Semite who has grotesquely referred to the slaughter of six million Jews in the Nazi Holocaust as a "myth". It is the task of the working class in Iran, leading women, national and ethnic minorities and all the oppressed behind it, to overthrow the Persian-chauvinist Islamic capitalist regime. Key to this perspective is the forging of a Leninist workers party. Such parties must be built throughout the Near East to unite the proletariat — Arab, Persian, Kurdish and Hebrew, Sunni and Shi'ite, Muslim and Christian — in struggle against imperialism and against the Zionists, mullahs, colonels, sheiks and all the other capitalist rulers. The fight for workers rule in the Near East crucially includes shattering the Zionist garrison state from within through Arab/Hebrew workers revolution.

This is the Trotskyist perspective of permanent revolution, which vitally includes the fight to extend working-class rule to the imperialist centres, not least through the struggle for socialist revolution in Britain and the US. In the struggle for a socialist federation of the Near East, Leninist workers parties are essential to break the proletariat of the region from fundamentalism, nationalism and illusions in imperialist "democracy". The Stalinised Communist parties of the Near East, which made a virtue of supporting various bourgeois forces, such as Mossadeq, betraying revolutionary opportunities, share responsibility for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism among the working and oppressed masses.

The British capitalist rulers are unrelenting allies of US imperialism, the deadliest force on the face of this planet. The task of revolutionaries in the imperialist centres is to fight for proletarian revolution against our "own" ruling class. The only solution to imperialist depredation is the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist order by the proletariat and its replacement with a rationally planned economy under the rule of the workers. When Bush and Blair launched their wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, both the Spartacist League/Britain and our comrades in the Spartacist League/US called for military defence of those countries, without giving an iota of political support to the regimes there. At the same time we call on the proletariat in Britain and in the US to wage class struggle against the capitalist rulers at home. As sections of the International Communist League, the Spartacist League/US is committed to the fight to forge a revolutionary workers party to lead the multiracial proletariat in the struggle to sweep away US imperialism while the Spartacist League/Britain is dedicated to building a revolutionary workers party to lead the multiethnic proletariat to likewise put an end to British imperialism through socialist revolution.

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