U.S. Marxist–Humanists
An affiliate of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization

The U.S. Marxist-Humanists organization, grounded in Marx's Marxism and Raya Dunayevskaya's ideas, aims to develop a viable vision of a truly new human society that can give direction to today's many freedom struggles.

To the Barbarism of Terrorism and War, We Pose the New Society

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As Marxist-Humanists, we oppose both sides of this disaster. Our ground is the absolute opposite of terrorism and statist militarism-the idea of freedom.

HUMANISM VS. TERROR

The Sept. 11 attack had no relation to a struggle against capitalism, injustice, or U.S. imperialism. It was a brutal act of violence against the U.S. people which had no rational legitimacy or justification. There is not a shred of liberatory political content to these acts, presumably carried out by Islamic fundamentalists under the leadership of Osama bin Laden. They were simply intended to kill as many people as possible. Such cruelty could only have been carried out by the most reactionary elements imaginable. And yet even in the midst of this anti-human destruction the light of humanism did shine in the hundreds of workers and citizens who flocked to "ground zero" in New York to help clear rubble, save victims, and provide medical aid to the injured. Spontaneous expressions of solidarity became commonplace-from construction workers rushing to save office workers, to Black youth helping elderly Jewish people get out of the area. The focal point of total devastation became the site from which its absolute opposite showed itself, as working people expressed their dignity and solidarity in the face of the disaster. The human dimension showed itself nationwide, as seen in prisons from Folsom Prison in California to Angola in Louisiana, where prisoners collected thousands of dollars to aid victims of the disaster.

These humanist expressions of solidarity, however, are being buried by Bush's effort to use the attacks as an excuse to militarize America, restrict civil liberties, and embark on what U.S. rulers have long aspired for-permanent military intervention. Bush is preparing to bomb and raid anywhere he deems fit to "eradicate terrorism"-even though this will mean killing thousands of innocent people in Afghanistan and elsewhere who have

suffered for years from the repressive, anti-woman, anti-human policies of such reactionary regimes.

BUSH'S DRIVE TO WAR

Afghanistan is for now the target of the U.S. military effort since its ruling Taliban regime of Islamic fundamentalists has sheltered Osama bin Laden, the presumed mastermind of the Sept. 11 bombings. Fighter planes, commando teams, and massive amounts of military materiel are being poured into Pakistan, which has been pressured into serving as a staging area for attacks on the Taliban-even though Pakistan was instrumental in bringing the Taliban to power and still has close relations with it.

Afghanistan has long resisted foreign invaders, and the U.S. seems to realize that it would be futile to try to occupy the entire country. It is instead focusing on a series of military attacks, ranging from commando raids and bombing missions to arming the Northern Alliance, a loose grouping of less-strict Islamic fundamentalists opposed to the Taliban who control a small part of Afghanistan near its border with Tajikistan. The U.S. is also sending troops to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which will serve as staging areas for attacks on Afghanistan. For the first time U.S. troops are operating on the soil of the former Soviet Union.

The battle lines do not stop at Afghanistan. As Bush stated in his Sept. 20 speech to Congress, his aim is not simply to attack Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda organization. He is rather projecting "a lengthy campaign unlike any other we have ever seen….It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated."

That can only mean one thing-that we are in for permanent war.

Let us not forget that the Israelis haven't been able to eradicate suicide bombers, even after imposing near-total restrictions on the movement of Palestinian civilians and targeting political figures for assassination-policies that Bush now seems to be adopting in his global "fight against terrorism."

The only way that Bush can even attempt to "find, stop and defeat" every terrorist opposed to the U.S. around the world is by imposing conditions of permanent militarization, especially since the indiscriminate kinds of military intervention now being contemplated by his administration are likely to only further swell the ranks of the terrorists.

What we said after Clinton attacked Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998 in response to the bombings of the U.S. embassies in East Africa-that the rulers are seeking to impose conditions of permanent war-has now come to pass. We are being thrust into a new, voracious, and deadly militarism.

THE WAR AT HOME

The first casualty of this is our rights and liberties at home. For the first time a cabinet-level "Office of Homeland Security" has been created, headed by Gov. Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania, the man who set an execution date for Mumia Abu-Jamal. Ridge is being given broad and undefined powers to coordinate surveillance of all kinds. An array of restrictions on civil liberties and political rights are being formulated, with little public discussion and debate.

The Justice Department has announced new regulations allowing it to detain immigrants indefinitely, without having to state any cause. Previously it faced a 24-hour deadline to release detainees or charge them with a crime. Additional provisions being considered are so broad that they may even enable the government to detain an entire ethnic group if it so chooses.

Ridge's "Office of Homeland Security" is also being given wide powers to allow the government to engage in telephone wiretaps and email searches. Racial profiling is being openly promoted after coming under searing criticism from minority communities for years. Randall L. Kennedy, a Harvard law professor, wrote, "The events of Sept. 11 are going to make it more difficult to get rid of racial profiling, both at the street level-what police actually do-and at the formal level of the courts."

Taken as a whole, the restrictions on civil liberties threaten to transform the very character of this country. The rights that Americans have fought to preserve and extend for generations are coming under direct attack.

The terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center and a section of the Pentagon handed Bush the greatest gift he could have asked for. It has given him a free hand to expand the military, gut domestic social programs, and bury the memory of his stolen election. On a single day the terrorists succeeded in totally shifting the ideological ground and handed the far Right one of its greatest victories.

We now face an explosion of repressive, counter-revolutionary forces which threaten to push this entire country backward.

INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS

This does not mean Bush has all the cards in his hands. Forces have been unleashed by the events of Sept. 11 that may be beyond anyone's control.

First, the impact of the attacks will almost surely send the U.S. into a recession. Over 100,000 workers have so far been laid off in New York, and 140,000 airline workers have been laid off nationwide. Combined with the cost of rebuilding lower Manhattan-the $20 billion allocated so far is just the beginning-and the fall-off of consumer spending and investment resulting from the disaster, the Sept. 11 attacks will usher the U.S. into a full recession.

In the 1990s U.S. economic growth accounted for 40% of the overall growth in the world economy. An economic downturn in the U.S. is sure to have a global impact. The U.S., Japan, Germany-the world's three largest economies-were all headed for recession, even before Sept. 11. For the first time since the mid-1970s, all the major players of the global economy are either in a recession or about to enter one.

The U.S. "won" the Gulf War of 1991 by getting Japan, West Europe, and the Gulf states to fund it to the tune of $100 billion. Where is that kind of money for permanent war going to come from today?

Second, world politics-especially Middle Eastern politics-is far too volatile for the U.S. to simply ride roughshod over each and every country.

Afghanistan was suffering from a deep social crisis even before Sept. 11. Famine, poverty, and repression by the Taliban had sent a million refugees fleeing to Pakistan. The threat of U.S. military intervention has further swelled this crisis; over one million more refugees are now en route to Pakistan which has closed its border with Afghanistan.

The vast majority of Afghans would be glad to be free of the Taliban. It would never have come to power without the direct aid of Pakistan, and, to a lesser degree, of the CIA. Since taking power in 1996 after a civil war between competing factions of Islamic fundamentalists, the Taliban has imposed one of the most repressive regimes on earth. Women are forbidden in public without being covered from head to toe and with a male escort; women cannot hold jobs or attend school; all forms of religious expression other than the Taliban's Wahabbism (a puritanical form of Islam imported from Saudi Arabia which is rejected by most Muslims) are outlawed; and Shi'ites as well as Afghanistan's numerous national minorities have been brutally repressed.

While few ordinary Afghans are willing to die for the Taliban, the matter is different when it comes to the thousands of "volunteers" from around the Middle East who have been fighting in Afghanistan as part of bin Laden's organization.

Bush has pressured Pakistan into serving as a U.S. base for attacks on the Taliban, but the move is fraught with danger and contradictions. Pakistan's military regime is itself dependent on support from Islamic fundamentalists. For instance, the group Harakat ul Mujaheddin, which the Pakistani military has made use of in its battles against Indian troops in Kashmir, is allied with bin Laden. Bush appears to have told Pakistan's General Musharraf that if he supports the U.S. war against Afghanistan the U.S. will support Pakistani interests in Kashmir-though that could end up strengthening forces allied with bin Laden.

Even more ominously, if Pakistan becomes destabilized because of Musharraf's support for the U.S., a real nightmare scenario could occur-the emergence of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Pakistan armed with nuclear weapons.

U.S. troops are now in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which have been torn for years by battles with fundamentalist factions. Russia, which still has thousands of troops in Tajikistan, apparently agreed to the U.S. troop deployment in exchange for the U.S. allowing it a free hand in its genocidal war against Chechnya.

China, which shares a border with Afghanistan, has also joined the U.S.'s "battle against terrorism," presumably in exchange for the U.S. remaining silent over its crackdown against an insurgency in its largely Muslim province of Xinjiang.

Meanwhile, Bush's effort to enlist Arab countries like Syria and Arafat's PLO in the "battle against terrorism" has evoked complaints from Israel's Sharon, who tried to make use of the Sept. 11 attacks to extend a total military crackdown against the Palestinians and subvert what is left of the peace process. Bush has for now leaned on Sharon to at least pretend to return to the bargaining table, but the Israel-Palestine conflict has a life of its own that can explode at any time.

THE SECOND AMERICA

Third, the most critical factor which may be beyond Bush's ability to control is the reaction of the American people to his drive for war. Hundreds of rallies and marches have been held across the country against the new militarism and the racist attacks against Muslims, Arab-Americans, Palestinians, South Asians and other people of color. Though Bush has also decried these attacks, many Muslims, immigrants and people of color who

are critical of his war moves feel increasingly vulnerable because of his declaration that all who are not for his "war against terrorism" are against him.

Some of the demonstrations against Bush have been spontaneous, like the protest in Union Square in New York, on Sept. 14. Over 200 rallies with such messages as "Islam is not the enemy, War is not the answer" have been held at colleges nationwide.

Most critical is the force which has been conspicuously absent from Bush's speeches and declarations-the Black dimension.

The Black dimension has been pivotal in opposing every stage of U.S. militarism. This is directly related to the fact that each such stage of militarization overseas is connected to mounting racism at home.

Black Americans were among the first to oppose the Spanish-American War of 1898. They were pivotal in opposing every U.S. military intervention since then, from World War I to the Vietnam War and beyond. Let us also not forget that the Harlem riots of 1943 took place in the midst of World War II.

The memory of events like the April Cincinnati rebellion have not been forgotten. Not only are racial profiling, police abuse, and racism just as real now as then, they are being amplified by Bush's drive for war. The spontaneous street protests by Black youth in Cincinnati on Sept. 26 in response to the acquittal of the cop who killed a Black youth last April is but one indication of the revolt brewing in Black America.

WHAT TO DO?

It is imperative that we completely and totally oppose Bush's effort to respond to anti-human terrorism with an equally inhuman policy of indiscriminate military intervention, just as we must oppose all efforts to restrict civil liberties at home or scapegoat Muslims, immigrants or people of color. But an effective opposition to this new militarism will not emerge unless we project a total view rooted not just in what we oppose, but what we are for.

It is therefore all the more disturbing that some on the Left have only mildly condemned the Sept. 11 attacks and argue that the real culprit is U.S. imperialism. U.S. military intervention against Iraq and its support of Israel, some say, has created a climate which drives opponents of the U.S. to pursue such "desperate measures" as suicide attacks. As John Keller put it in "The Chickens Come Home to Roost," "When a big country uses its

military or money to push around a smaller country, the small country can only fight back via terrorism."

This amounts to a bizarre spectacle. While the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks remain silent as to their motives, "leftist" commentators from Alexander Cockburn to Naomi Klein are trying to provide the rationale for them. All we need to know, presumably, are the crimes of U.S. imperialism, and then the reasons for the Sept. 11 attack supposedly become "understandable." All too many leftists seem to view their role as being conceptual ambassadors for the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 disaster.

Such "explanations" misconstrue the nature of the forces which conducted the attacks. Reactionary Islamic fundamentalism is not simply driven by hatred of U.S. imperialist acts against Iraq, Palestine, or any other country. Islamic fundamentalism is just as much driven by hatred of feminism, homosexuality, and workers' rights. Groups like Afghanistan's Taliban, Algeria's FIA, and the terrorist cells in Egypt have murdered Marxist professors as well as indigenous writers and singers. They represent a rejection of those aspects of western society created through decades of struggles by workers, women, gays and lesbians and minorities for a more open and free society.

Such reactionary tendencies are most of all driven by hatred of the struggles for liberties which are indigenous to Afghan and Muslim societies, which they falsely denigrate as "western." Islamic fundamentalism is not just a holdover of "feudalism"; it is a product of the modern world and is a reaction against the struggles for freedom which are endemic to it.

The root of the inhumanity unleashed on Sept. 11 is class society and the barbarism intrinsic to it. This is the ground which gives rise both to mperialism and reactionary forces such as those responsible for the terrorist attacks.

Bin Laden fights the U.S. not from a position of seeking freedom for the masses, but as the representative of one national (or transnational) ruling elite in contention with another one. The nature of the Sept. 11 attacks supports this view. As is true for all ruling classes who conduct warfare, the masses were wholly expendable, their humanity unimportant. Tamim Ansary, an Afghan-American opposed to the Taliban wrote: "We're flirting with a world war between Islam and the West. And guess what: that's bin Laden's program. That's exactly what he wants. That's why he did this. Read his speeches and statements. He really believes Islam would beat the West. It might seem ridiculous, but he figures if he can polarize the world into Islam vs. the West, he's got a billion soldiers. If the West wreaks a holocaust in those lands, that's a billion people with nothing left to lose, that's

even better from bin Laden's point of view. He's probably wrong, in the end the West would win, whatever that would mean, but the war would last for years and millions would die, not just theirs but ours."

It isn't just that the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 attack have played into Bush's hands. Bush's drive for "permanent war" against "terrorism," with him even calling this a "new crusade," also plays directly into the hands of bin Laden.

These seeming opposites, Bush and bin Laden, are not so opposite. They are the reverse mirror image of one another. The other of the other turns out to be…the same. Just as bin Laden's acts strengthen Bush, so Bush's indiscriminate military intervention provides bin Laden with what he wants-a prolonged war between "Muslims" and the West.

TWO WORLDS IN EACH COUNTRY

Yes, U.S. imperialism is a terrible force which wreaks enormous destruction throughout the world. And yes, the U.S. is implicated in the crimes against humanity of the Taliban and bin Laden-the CIA supported bin Laden when he fought the Russians and U.S. aid to the Taliban in the 1980s enabled it to eventually come to power.

But by the same token, these forces are implicated in the crimes of the U.S. Islamic fundamentalism has again and again strengthened U.S. imperialism by taking actions which have undermined revolutionary forces and solidified counter-revolutionary policies. This was true in 1979, when the taking of hostages at the U.S. embassy in Iran by Islamic fundamentalists helped Reagan achieve political ascendancy. That is true today, when an anti-feminist, homophobic fundamentalism of an even more reactionary bent is breathing new life into the inheritors of Reaganism.

Those fighting for human liberation need to make it clear that the attack of Sept. 11 was not a viable protest or response to the U.S. or any of the atrocities it perpetrates around the world. To even hint otherwise is an attack on freedom movements in the U.S. and internationally and can result only in further isolating leftists from the masses.

For its part, the Taliban no more speaks for Muslims or Afghans than does its ideological twin, Jerry Falwell, speak for the American masses. There are two worlds in every country, including in Afghanistan.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan declared, "There is a vast difference between the poor, devastated people of Afghanistan and the terrorist Taliban criminals. While we announce our solidarity and deep sorrow with the people of the U.S.,

we also believe that attacking Afghanistan and killing its ruined and destitute people will not in any way decrease the grief of the American people. We hope that the great American people could differentiate between the people of Afghanistan and a handful of fundamentalist terrorists."

It is no less imperative to single out the two worlds in this country. We need to decisively reject the argument, recently made by an anarchist, that "The American populace to a large extent shares responsibility for the deaths of their compatriots, as they share responsibility for all the deaths carried out by or in the interests of the U.S. military."

BEYOND 'ANTI-IMPERIALISM'

The notion that reactionary opponents of U.S. imperialism are the "lesser evil" has for far too long disoriented would-be revolutionaries. It has led them into opportunism and realpolitik, distancing them from the aspirations of the masses of human beings for genuine liberation. In recent years, such attitudes have caused a section of the Left to betray the Bosnian and Kosovar people, and tacitly to give support to Milosevic's genocide.

The lesser-evilism which underlies much of the Left's silence on Bosnia, and its refusal to support the movement for national self-determination in Kosova, has only succeeded in strengthening the power of U.S. imperialism. The reason so many despair of the struggle for freedom and turn to national chauvinism, xenophobia and statism is that they see no liberatory alternative to capitalism. Instead of responding to each political crisis by repeating the same old slogans against "U.S. imperialism," revolutionaries have a responsibility to oppose all societies and tendencies based on alienated human relations while projecting a positive vision of a new society, what Karl Marx called "positive humanism, beginning from itself." Only in that way can humanity see that there is an alternative to capitalism-imperialism.

In a word, those opposing Bush's drive for war need to take this moment to stop and think.

Nowhere is that more important than for the movement against global capital, which reached a turning point in Genoa this summer. The atmosphere descending upon this country is such that many are asking whether the opening reached in the movement will be shut down. But the answer to this is not to just beat the drum for more activity, as if repeating familiar criticisms of U.S. policy will by itself suffice.

Nor is the answer to "transform" the anti-globalization movement into an anti-war movement, as if we should return to the politics of old. The greatness of the anti-

globalization movement is that it contains a deeper and broader message, open to an array of struggles and forces. To narrow the anti-globalization movement to the stance of traditional coalitions of old will only play into the hands of the vanguardists.

The vanguardists will be able to win out, however, so long as the movement keeps its distance from the ideas which can enable it to project a positive vision of total human liberation.

We live at a moment when political opposition must have a total view in order to be effective. We must take a firm stand against all forms of injustice, whether propagated by terrorists, U.S. imperialism, or by anyone else, while developing a comprehensive perspective of the new human relations we are for. Never has dialogue and debate on the need for a philosophy of revolution been more important, not alone for the forward movement of the struggles against global capital, but for their very existence.

As two colleagues of ours wrote in response to our initial statement on the two-fold disaster of Sept. 11:

"The savage assaults of Sept. 11 are not the opposite of capitalism and imperialism, but their reverse mirror image. Epistemologically, the new jingoism and the new jihad are on equal footing: both are fundamentalisms, and both bring forth the intrinsically violent character of all fundamentalisms, as the thought gives rise to the deed. A genuinely dialectical opposition to capitalism and imperialism will not stop short at any 'first negation' that happens to come along: this abstract point finds its concrete dialectical image in the reactionary figure of an Osama bin Laden. The dialectical opponent is as equally obligated to 'negate this negation,' that is, to criticize the irrationality, the insanity and inhumanity of this blind reaction. If the Left equivocates in this critical task, it will only be to its further discredit and marginalization. However much Bush and bin Laden seem made for each other, neither is made for the future we can still project through the darkness of this High Noon."

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