

Socialist Worker

Who is Osama bin Laden?



Suicide attacks bring widespread death:

THE BITTER FRUIT OF U.S. POLICY



EARLY ON US officials were blaming Osama bin Laden and his al-Quaida organisation for the attacks.

The US State Department calls him "one of the most significant sponsors of Islamic extremist activities in the world today."

But throughout the 1980s, the US and Mr Bin Laden were on the same side against the now-collapsed Soviet Union.

Bin Laden is a millionaire construction magnate from Saudi Arabia who formed a pan-Muslim army to fight in the US backed mujaheddin war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Then the US daubed these fighters "holy warriors" against the Russian backed regime in Afghanistan at the time, now the same forces are "international terrorists."

Bin Laden used his millions to buy bulldozers to gouge guerrilla trails in the heart of Afghanistan and to bring in thousands of Egyptians, Lebanese, Turks and others to join Afghan Muslims against the Russian army in Afghanistan.

Nine years after Russia was forced out of Afghanistan, Bin Laden was held responsible for the August 1998 twin bombings of US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which killed 257 people.

The US responded by blowing up the only medicine factory in the desperately poor country of Sudan, and attacked with cruise missiles and Tomahawks "camps" in Afghanistan with widescale civilian deaths and injuries.

The Pentagon claimed Bin Laden was operating from these camps in Afghanistan.

These were the same camps the CIA built when it backed the mujaheddin against the Soviet Union.

Bin Laden and his followers had declared a jihad or holy war against the US in the 1990s. They demanded US troops get out of Saudi Arabia, as Washington promised in 1990. Saudi Arabia is the site of Islam's two holiest shrines.

He claims US soldiers safeguarding oil in his homeland are desecrating the Muslim holy sites with their very presence. US power has emasculated Arab states, turning them into clients, and Washington is one of Israel's main allies.

He declared, "We—with God's help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans."

Bin Laden and his followers also point to the massacre on April 18th, 1996, of 106 Lebanese civilians at a UN base by Israeli artillery.

When a UN report judged the Qana massacre to have been deliberate, Washington tried to suppress the document, then punished the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for releasing it by depriving him of a second term in office.

The aeroplane suicide missions which attacked the US have brought a terrible tragedy.

Innocent passengers have been used as unwitting weapons of death.

Office workers have been slain just because they worked in the World Trade Centre. Hundreds of fire fighters lost their lives as they tried to rescue people.

Socialists are opposed to this indiscriminate loss of life.

Ever since the Vietnam War ended, US leaders have told their people that they were invulnerable. Wars were always fought outside the US. They could even be fought from miles up in the sky with no losses to US soldiers.

The bombings have shattered that myth of invulnerability.

The US employs 100,000 people in its intelligence services – yet they knew nothing of the widespread planning that went into this

attack.

All of this shows what nonsense the Star Wars project is.

Bush wants to spend £120 billion on a defence system, which he claimed would pro-

tect the US from rogue states.

His aim was to allow the US military to operate with impunity around the world while the US remained invulnerable.

But the attacks on the US were carried out by people operating from inside, armed with knives.

No Star Wars system could have shot them down.

Moreover the scale of the deaths was increased by the shortcomings built into the profit system.

Security

The US airline industry argued against any real security controls on internal flights.

They employ security personnel on the lowest of wages – with the average employee lasting only twelve months.

The professor of civil engineering in UCD has pointed out that the twin towers of the World Trade Centre collapsed so quickly because the steel girders inside were not re-inforced with fire resistant materials.

The plain truth is that the US can no longer regard itself as a super-power that is invulnerable to the rage and anger that its policies cause.

The tragedy is that the perpetrators of this act have identified the American people with their government and have brought death on a devastating scale.

SYMBOLS OF OPPRESSION

Bush and the Pentagon want to use the incidents to launch revenge attacks. So they claim that the bombings are directed at 'civilisation' and 'freedom'.

In reality they were carried out by people who were driven into despair by the human rights abuses that the US leaders have perpetrated across the world.

More than 600 Palestinians have been murdered since they start of their protests against occupation by Israel. US made Apache helicopters, F-16 rifles and M-16 rifles have been used for the killing. Official US aid to Israel amounts to \$6 billion a year.

Bush's father sent his planes to bomb Iraq ten years ago. 100,000 civilians and conscript soldiers died in what the Pentagon contemptuously called 'collateral damage'. Since then one quarter of a million Iraqi children have died as a direct result of US imposed sanctions.

For 78 days US planes bombed Serbia and Kosovo, killing hundreds of civilians. They died in their sleep or at work with as little warning as those who died in New York.

The attacks represent the chickens of the US callous foreign policy coming home to roost. The targets that were selected are symbols of oppression to millions of people across the globe.

They do not have Cruise missiles—so they take to turning a hijacked airliner into a suicide bomb instead. It is not a method that can break US power.

Some military officials would have suffered from the explosion at the Pentagon. But many more innocent civilians were killed in New York and Washington.

Tuesday's suicide raids were born of desperation at the supreme arrogance and contempt of the rulers of the most powerful capitalist state on Earth.

What we think

Marxism and terrorism

THE DEVASTATING attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the US have seen politicians and press unite to denounce those responsible as “evil terrorists” with no regard for “the sanctity of human life”.

As *Socialist Worker* went to press on the media were suggesting that the attacks were carried out by groups based in the Middle East.

We did not know whether that was true.

But whoever was responsible, socialists have a clear attitude.

We abhor violence, and oppose indiscriminate bombings of civilians.

Politicians like US president George W Bush, Tony Blair and most of the media have a quite different attitude.

They are all in fact quite happy to condone, carry out and cheer on indiscriminate bombings, plane strikes from the air and wholesale murder of civilians.

So in the last decade the US has bombed hospitals, factories and schools in Iraq, Serbia, Somalia and elsewhere, killing many, many thousands of innocent civilians.

Tony Blair also sent British planes to bomb in Serbia and Kosovo, killing civilians and refugees.

The truth is that for politicians like Bush and Blair one sort of terrorism—the brutal state terrorism of the biggest imperialist powers, the US and Britain—is justified, but the terrorism of those who have suffered as a result is not.

Socialists reject this hypocrisy and take an entirely different approach.

Our stance is summed up in the writings of the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky on terrorism.

Although written over 80 years ago, Trotsky's writings remain an invaluable guide. First of all Trotsky dealt brilliantly with the hypocrisy of our rulers.

Socialists, he argued, have “nothing in common with those bought and paid for moralists who, in response to any terrorist act, make solemn declarations about the ‘absolute value’ of human life.”

“These are the same peo-

ple who, on other occasions, in the name of other absolute values—for example, the nation's honour or the monarch's prestige—are ready to shove millions of people into the hell of war.” Trotsky also understood that terrorism arose because of the tyranny and oppression of our rulers.

“We understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance,” he wrote.

But “individual revenge does not satisfy us”, said Trotsky. Moreover, as a political strategy for change, Marxists were “irreconcilably opposed” to terrorism. A terrorist aims at particular individual government ministers or their armies, security forces or symbols of power.

But the exploitation socialists are fighting is not the product of an individual minister or even of particular governments.

The exploitation, oppression and injustices in society are a product of a world economic system of capitalism, not of particular individuals within it, however brutal and obnoxious they might be.

“The capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them. The classes it serves will always find new people,” wrote Trotsky.

That means acts of terrorism have very limited consequences. Trotsky put it like this: “The smoke from the explosion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before—only police repression grows more savage and brazen.”

It follows that to rid the world of oppression and injustice requires not merely the assassination of particular ministers or the blowing up of military or other targets, but tearing up the roots of the capitalist system itself.

Strength

The only force with the power to do that is the collective strength of the working class.

Trotsky wrote, “A strike, even of modest size, has social consequences—the



Devastation in the US

strengthening of the workers' self confidence, growth of the trade union and, not infrequently, even an improvement in production technology.”

By contrast the terrorist act takes place “behind the backs of the masses”. Individual terrorists or terrorist groups do not even have to have the mass of people behind them to plant a bomb, stage an attack or assassinate the leaders of a state.

Rather, acts of terrorism represent a desperate attempt by a minority to substitute themselves for mass action.

Sometimes terrorist groups do achieve a significant level of support.

This was the case, for instance, with the Provisional IRA in the early 1980s around the campaign for the H-Block hunger strikers.

And it is certainly true that Middle Eastern groups who have staged attacks in the US or Europe have found support among ordinary Palestinians and across the Middle East.

That support is easy to understand.

Palestinians have been on

the receiving end over the last year of continuous murderous assaults by Israel, backed to the hilt by the US.

Even before the latest round of US-backed Israeli terror the Palestinians had suffered over half a century of forcible deportation, violence and murder at the hands of Israel and the US.

No wonder that, faced with that, some people feel desperate enough to lash out and strike back in any way they feel possible.

But even when armed or terrorist groups win support, that mass backing is seen by the groups as a backdrop to the real struggle.

Weapons

That struggle remains the terrorist acts themselves.

And those acts—the planning of an attack, the securing of weapons and the planting of the bomb, for example—are carried out in secret only by a tiny minority.

A terrorist assassination or bombing can also introduce deep disarray into the ranks of the working class, particularly when ordinary

people are killed or injured.

That can create a favourable atmosphere for the introduction of new measures of state repression.

Moreover individual terrorism, says Trotsky, “belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness”. Trotsky asked, “If it is enough to arm oneself with a pistol in order to achieve one's goal, why the efforts of the class struggle?”

If a thimbleful of gunpowder and a little chunk of lead is enough to shoot the enemy through the neck, what need is there for a class organisation?”

So terrorism is not just a different method of struggle against oppression, but runs counter to the fight for socialism.

As Trotsky put it, “The revolvers of individual heroes instead of the people's cudgels and pitchforks, bombs instead of barricades—that is the real formula of terrorism.”

The sort of society socialists are fighting for is one where workers themselves take control and run society in their own interests. Such a society cannot be

achieved by the actions of a tiny minority, but can only be forged through the mass activity of workers themselves.

Moreover it is through the process of revolutionary struggle that workers begin to throw off all the reactionary ideology of the capitalist system and become, as the socialist Karl Marx put it, “fitted to found society anew”.

Therefore the revolution itself is a crucial part of preparing workers with the confidence in their ability to run society and their lives.

Struggle

Socialists do not deny the working class and the oppressed the right to use violence against their oppressors.

We know that the ruling class will not give up all their power, wealth and privileges without a struggle.

For socialists that struggle cannot be conducted by individuals or elite groups, but only through the collective struggle of the mass of the working class and oppressed.