

Red-Brown Politics

Anarchists Must Not Take the Bait

Bill Weinberg

Fascists are seeking to exploit and co-opt anti-war forces in the US, and build support for war criminals like Assad and Putin. Anarchists have a responsibility to reject such overtures and offer solidarity to those resisting in Syria.

Following the chemical gas attack on the rebel-held Syrian city of Douma in April, Trump staged retaliatory air-strikes, and a protest against the U.S. military actions was held in Los Angeles.

The march featured placards displaying portraits of Syrian leader Bashar Assad and slogans supporting the genocidal dictator including, “As-sad is protecting civilians; he is not bombing his own people.”

Where else have we seen such open support for Assad? At the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that saw deadly violence last August. One figure on the scene was white nationalist David Duke, who proclaimed on Twitter, “Civilized world stands with Assad.”

Video clips from Charlottesville show an alt-right mouthpiece, Anthime “Tim” Gionet, more commonly known as Baked Alaska, saying to the camera with his buddies, “Assad’s the man, brother! Two chemical bombs would have solved this whole ISIS business!” A sentiment less hypocritical than that of the supposed anti-war marchers in Los Angeles.

There was even overlap between the two rallies. Baked Alaska appeared in a selfie-video at the anti-war march in L.A. Eventually, some marchers got wise and chased him off, but they do not appear to have been from the ANSWER Coalition, the main march organizers.

There is a definite convergence underway between the anti-war left and the alt-right (or fascist right, to be less euphemistic) around support for Assad—part of a phenomenon termed Red-Brown politics. That is the phrase used by its advocates in Europe: the notion of an alliance between the left and fascism against the liberal order and the West. You do not have to be a supporter of the liberal order and the West to recognize this as an incredibly dangerous idea.

Yet, it has been building for some time. After the first big chemical attack in Syria, at Ghouta in 2013, two prominent figures on the U.S. left made junkets to Syria to express support for the regime: Cynthia McKinney, a former congress member and Green Party presidential candidate, and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, both leading lights of the International Action Center. The IAC is one of several entities on the anti-war left in the U.S., including ANSWER, to emerge from the Workers World Party (WWP), a Stalinist sect now the foremost stateside purveyor of Red-Brown politics.

The next person of note to make a Syria junket, attending a confab hosted by the Assad regime the following year, was Nick Griffin of the British National Party—the neo-fascist formation that is harnessing xenophobia in the UK.

And various European National Socialist organizations have sent brigades to Syria to fight for Assad.

In 2017, U.S. Congressional Representative Tulsi Gabbard, a Democrat from Hawaii, widely admired on the anti-war left and a prominent figure in Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign, traveled to Syria, where she met with Assad.

The 2016 U.S. Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein also expressed support for the Syrian government, and her running mate, Ajamu Barak, views Assad very positively. After the dictator's thoroughly controlled pseudo-elections that confirmed his rule in 2014, Barak hailed this as a repudiation of the West, crowing about Assad's support among the Syrian people, and how the opposition was "fomented" by the "gangster states of NATO." Stein, in an interview later scrubbed from the internet, referred to the Ghouta chemical attack as a "false flag" implying it was the rebels themselves who used the poison gas to provoke Western intervention.

An incipient Red-Brown alliance is converging on the global stage. One of the key figures calling for such an alliance in explicit terms is Alexander Dugin, a Russo-nationalist ideologue and political guru to Vladimir Putin. Dugin is consciously bringing together supposed anti-war figures in the West with neo-fascists around the idea of supporting despots like Putin and Assad in the name of a "multi-polar world." He calls for both sides to "put aside anti-communist, as well as antifascist, prejudices," which are "the instruments in the hands of liberals and globalists with which they keep their enemies divided."

In one telling episode, December 2014 saw an international Duginist conference in Moscow on the "Right of Peoples to Self-Determination and Building a Multi-Polar World," bringing together various Euro-fascist formations. Participants included a delegation of Americans representing the IAC and United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), another group in the orbit of the WWP.

Also in attendance at the Moscow confab was a delegation of white nationalists from the neo-Confederate League of the South!

These same entities which purport to stand up to the alt-right and white nationalists at home were happy to sit down and schmooze with them in Moscow.

This also recalls Jill Stein's December 2015 junket to Moscow for a conference hosted by Kremlin media mouthpiece RT, in which she supped with Putin and Mike Flynn—then candidate Trump's military policy advisor and later President Trump's arch-reactionary National Security Advisor.

This same tendency can now be seen entering mainstream discourse. Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson engaged in the same kind of speculation that the Assad regime wasn't behind the Douma chemical attack that we also heard from supposedly left-wing journalist Robert Fisk. For spewing this denialism about the attack, Carlson, a figure of the right, was praised by Jimmy Dore, a popular video commentator who calls his program "Aggressive Progressive."

In recent months, Carlson's right wing cable news show has featured left-liberal guests such as Glen Greenwald, co-editor of online news site The Intercept, and Stephen Cohen, a Princeton Russian studies professor.

Cohen is featured regularly in The Nation magazine where his wife is editor, and has turned the liberal magazine into a vehicle for Russian propaganda, making it a foremost voice for the Kremlin position in U.S. media.

Anti-war and anti-fascist forces in the West are in grave danger of being co-opted by warmongers and fascists. It is imperative that anarchists do not take this toxic bait. As anarchists, it is our job to organize independent of the self-appointed anti-war leadership, and to work to build an alternative.

An anarchist alternative would be ruthlessly single-standard in its opposition to war—which means saying no to Assad and Putin as well as Trump, and offering solidarity to the anti-authoritarian currents in the Syrian Revolution. Not betraying them by acquiescing with their oppressors.

Bill Weinberg blogs at **CounterVortex.org**.

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/401-summer-2018/red-brown-politics>
Fifth Estate #401, Summer 2018

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