

Rohini Hensman's *Indefensible*: The ISO discovers its muse—the CIA—Part 4

By Alex Lantier
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The following is the conclusion of a four-part review of Indefensible: Democracy, Counterrevolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism.

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Imperialist propaganda backing assault on democratic rights

Hensman's attempts to provide a moral-humanitarian rationale for supporting imperialist wars as "democratic revolutions" form an obscene political lie. The end of the Soviet Union did not spell the final triumph of capitalist democracy, as foreseen by Hensman, and leave US wars as a glorious mechanism to advance democracy worldwide. Rather, as the ICFI insisted, it was part of a mortal crisis of the capitalist political system, based around US world hegemony, that emerged from World War II.

Hensman, it has already been noted, supports US and European imperialism because she sees in them "democratic states that allow working people to fight back against the forces exploiting and oppressing them." Likewise, she considers their wars for regime change an attempt to export their political system. This is yet another falsehood, based on Hensman's indifference towards democratic rights. In fact, her vicious attacks on left-wing opponents of imperialism align her with forces that are not only preparing for world war against Russia, but waging savage austerity against workers and building police state regimes in America, Europe and beyond.

Hensman hysterically attacks Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks. Assange has been trapped inside the Ecuadorian embassy for six years, fighting trumped-up rape allegations that are part of Washington's attempt to extradite him to the United States and try him on espionage charges for publishing evidence of US war crimes and other official criminality in Iraq and elsewhere. Hensman, however, crudely denounces the courageous whistleblower as a tool of Putin.

She writes, "pseudo-anti-imperialists will support any regime that is supported by Russia, no matter how right wing it may be – just like WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, whose affinity to Putin led him to help Trump win the US presidency and continue to support him thereafter (Beauchamp 2017; Boot 2017; Ioffe 2017). The neo-Stalinists influence many people ... who may not be Stalinists and may even call themselves Trotskyists, like the International Committee of the Fourth International."

Characteristically, Hensman makes no argument and provides no evidence to support her claim that Assange has an "affinity" for Vladimir Putin. She quotes right-wing war propagandists denouncing Assange, like *Wall Street Journal* and *Weekly Standard* editor Max Boot, whose word is clearly good enough for Hensman.

Such groundless accusations against Assange are Hensman's contribution to the mass anti-Russian campaign in the US media and political establishment, led by the Democratic Party. Totally unsubstantiated accusations of Russian meddling in US elections have served as a pretext for moves to censor the Internet, block the WWSWS and other anti-war web sites from appearing in Google searches, and prepare

large-scale censorship of web search engines and social media.

Hensman, the ISO and their allies are joining the ruling elite's move to censor the internet and build a police state in America, based on the claim that this is the only way to protect America from "Russian meddling." In fact, the real target of this deeply anti-democratic campaign is the growing social opposition among workers and youth to low wages, super exploitation, war and endless police killings.

Hensman's hostility to democratic rights extends across the Atlantic to Europe. There, her defense of the Syrian war turned into a bitter attack on political opponents of the state of emergency in France, imposed after the ISIS terror attacks in Paris targeting restaurants, the Bataclan theater, and the Stade de France football stadium on November 13, 2015.

Hensman condemns left-wing "reactions to the ISIS attacks of November 2015 in Paris, many of which attributed them either to 'blowback' from Western intervention in Muslim countries, or to a reaction to racist discrimination against people of African origin in France and Belgium ... 'The attackers targeted sites of inclusiveness and conversation,' and 'explaining' this right-wing assault in any other way than recognising it for what it is entails participating in targeting the most progressive features of 'the West.'"

The ISIS terror attacks in Paris and across Europe were the outcome of the reactionary war in Syria waged by European imperialism in alliance with Washington and ISIS. The November 13 attacks in Paris, like all those that ensued in Europe, were carried out by ISIS operatives who were well known to NATO intelligence agencies. Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the leader of the operation and key recruiter for ISIS, boasted on social media that he could freely cross borders across Europe and the broader region, even though he was the subject of an international arrest warrant.

Despite the official condemnations of ISIS, Abaaoud's recruitment network was tolerated by French and NATO intelligence as a key asset in the war for regime change in Syria.

For Hensman, making this point—which is now recognized by over a fifth of the French people—is to attack "the most progressive features of 'the West.'" This is another political fraud. The state of emergency entailed suspending basic democratic rights, handing police the right to carry out arbitrary searches and seizures, censor the media and massively spy on the population in order to prepare major attacks on the working class.

Significantly, deputies of the Left Front—the allies of Gilbert Achcar's NPA—voted to first impose the state of emergency in the National Assembly in November 2015. This indicates the broad support for attacks on democratic rights within the affluent middle-class milieu of the ISO.

The state of emergency was used to suppress mass demonstrations by workers and youth against French President François Hollande's labor law and ram it through parliament without even a vote. This labor law, supplemented by President Emmanuel Macron's labor decrees, which he unilaterally imposed after talks with the trade unions, now serves as the basic framework for Macron to tear up all the social gains of the French

working class after the Liberation from Nazi Occupation.

As he hands tens of billions of euros in tax breaks to the rich, Macron is planning to spend €300 billion over the next five years to build up France's military machine and bring back the draft. At the same time, he is slashing wage levels for rail and public sector workers, privatizing the National Railways, and planning historic cuts to pensions, health care, unemployment compensation, and other key programs. The class content of his policy is exemplified by his recent decision to hail France's Nazi-collaborationist dictator, Philippe Pétain, as a military hero.

With her promotion of pro-war and neo-fascistic anti-Russian sentiments, Hensman is backing attempts by the capitalist ruling class to repudiate all the social concessions made in the 20th century, in order to prepare a new world war in the 21st. Attempts to give this policy a democratic gloss are fraudulent. The one "democratic revolution" she presents as entirely accomplished—the US-led regime change operation that brought Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena to power in the 2015 elections—is a case in point.

As Washington was preparing this regime change operation, it was also backing UN threats to try officials in the previous government of President Mahinda Rajapakse for the mass murder of Tamil civilians and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009. This provoked criticism of Washington's hypocrisy, given its massacre of hundreds of thousands of people in US-occupied Iraq, and its support for officials involved in the 2009 massacre, like General Sarath Fonseka. In order to defend the regime change operation that ultimately unfolded, Hensman bitterly attacks such criticism:

It is legitimate to question the motives of Western governments or their double standards when they support human rights and democracy in certain instances and not in others; but what justification is there for opposing them when they ask for accountability for war crimes ... ? That is exactly what these 'anti-imperialist' icons of twenty-first-century socialism were doing in the case of Sri Lanka. There was no question of sanctions against Sri Lanka, much less military action; all that was being debated were the UNHRC resolutions that might have embarrassed the regime in power and helped opponents to replace it with one which had more respect for human rights and democracy. While that did not materialise in 2009, it did in subsequent years. When Sri Lankans did eventually manage to bring about regime change in 2015, it was no thanks to the pseudo-anti-imperialists.

In fact, the coalition government cobbled together, in talks involving the Clinton Foundation and the CIA, between factions of Sirisena's Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) and the right-wing United National Party (UNP), had no more "respect for human rights and democracy" than its predecessor. Sirisena himself had overseen the horrific 2009 massacre at Mullivaikal, as Rajapakse's acting defense secretary. And he included in his cabinet Sarath Fonseka, the Sri Lankan Army commander, who planned and led the massacre. They had no intention of trying those responsible for the mass murder, because they themselves were responsible for it.

US imperialism's purpose in installing Sirisena in power was not to grant democratic rights to the population of Sri Lanka, but to oust Rajapakse, whom it saw as too close to China, Washington's main geostrategic rival in Asia.

The outcome of the 2015 regime change operation vindicated not the views of Tamil bourgeois defenders of US imperialism, like Hensman, but Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution. As Trotsky

explained, the bourgeoisie of the ex-colonial countries, hopelessly tied to imperialism, is incapable of resolving any significant democratic issue. Their resolution requires a struggle waged by the working class on the basis of a socialist and anti-capitalist program.

The regime change did not resolve any of the political issues facing workers in Sri Lanka, or the Tamil population. Ruined by the war, the Sirisena regime sought financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in exchange for austerity measures, which provoked growing protests from workers, youth and peasants. Throughout, it deployed the Sri Lankan army to police the Tamil-majority north and east of Sri Lanka, and to jail thousands of Tamil political prisoners.

Ultimately, it took less than four years for Hensman's supposedly successful democratic revolution in Sri Lanka to collapse. This year, amid growing strikes and social struggles, Sirisena ousted his prime minister, right-winger Ranil Wickremesinghe, and tried to install Mahinda Rajapakse—whom Hensman had described as the target for overthrow by a democratic revolution—as prime minister. This provoked a bitter and ruthless faction fight within Colombo's political establishment.

Hensman's enthusiasm for imperialist regime change in her native country, based on the lie that this produces "more respect for human rights and democracy," testifies to her political bankruptcy. Imperialism, Lenin famously remarked, is "reaction all down the line." Attempting to cast herself as a prophet of imperialism's goodness, Hensman has emerged as a defender of war, social regression and police-state repression across the globe.

The ICFI and the pseudo left

Great crises ruthlessly expose the class character of political organizations. The crisis through which world capitalism is passing—marked by the disintegration of US world hegemony established in World War II, and by constant threats of a new world war—has exposed the "left" parties of the affluent middle class. Their publication of *Indefensible* and their endorsement of Hensman's arguments supporting imperialist war, brand them as conscious agents of capitalist reaction.

Broad masses of workers and youth around the world are moving in a diametrically opposite direction. They are becoming ever more outraged by endless war and austerity, and are becoming supportive of socialism. This is a dramatic vindication of the ICFI's decades-long defense of Trotskyism against Stalinism, "state capitalist" forces like the ISO, and Pabloites, such as the French NPA and Australian SA.

What separates the ICFI from these groups, which the ICFI has defined as the "pseudo left," are not tactical differences within left politics, but the class gulf between a proletarian internationalist tendency fighting for world socialist revolution and reactionary, pro-imperialist parties of the affluent middle class. Hensman's embrace of US wars, waged in alliance with Al Qaeda-linked Islamists and Ukrainian fascists, is an irrefutable illustration of this political reality.

Indefensible is, itself, the product of the corrupt links between corporate and CIA-linked foundations and the affluent middle class operatives that run Haymarket Books and the ISO. The Lannan Foundation, which was established by J. Patrick Lannan, and now helps fund salaries and expenses for Haymarket Books, is a classical example.

The *New York Times* identified Lannan in a September 27, 1983 obituary as a "business executive, financial consultant and patron of the arts," who had served as "a director of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation for 36 years. He retired as director emeritus last May." The *Times* also applauded Lannan for having "established the Lannan Foundation to give financial help to needy artists and writers."

This identification of Lannan as a director of International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) from the 1940s to the early 1980s is significant: ITT was a major force behind the 1973 coup in Chile that toppled Salvador

Allende and installed the bloody dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Angered by Allende's nationalization of its stake in the Chilean Telephone Company, ITT funded and supported right-wing demonstrations in the run-up to Pinochet's coup.

And ITT's beneficiaries at the Lannan Foundation and at Haymarket Books still act today to corrupt and bribe academics and journalists, who churn out publications compatible with the ISO's orientation to the Democratic Party and US corporate interests. When mass struggles develop in the working class, it will not take long for the unbridgeable gulf separating them from the workers to be fully exposed. The alternative for the working class, in America and internationally, is to turn to the traditions of the October Revolution and of Trotskyism, defended today only by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Concluded

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