

A political strategy to oppose war against Iraq

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The thousands of people participating in the October 26 demonstrations in Washington and other cities speak for millions of Americans, ignored by the politicians and the media, who are outraged by the Bush administration's plans for an unprovoked invasion of Iraq.

They know the government is lying when it justifies the war with talk of "weapons of mass destruction" and invocations of the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The onslaught that is now being prepared against Iraq represents a revival of colonialism in its most brutal form. Countless thousands of Iraqis will be exterminated in a war of aggression whose purpose is the seizure of oil fields and the establishment of an American imperialist empire based on global terror.

Those demonstrating this weekend want to stop the US government from carrying out a horrific crime against humanity. Looming is a war in which the most powerful industrialized nation in the world unleashes its military might against a helpless country that was militarily defeated in 1991 and has since been subjected to constant bombing and sanctions resulting in nearly two million deaths.

Bush administration officials have already let it be known that Washington intends to transform Iraq into a US-controlled military protectorate. Recent press reports, moreover, have made it clear that this aim will be achieved through mass murder. The *New York Times* on October 22 cited a recent document on urban warfare by the Joint Chiefs of Staff that calls for the application of overwhelming firepower to seize control of Iraq's cities.

The report incorporates the lessons learned from such past military attacks on civilian populations as the US aerial assault on Belgrade, the Russian sacking of Grozny and the Israeli destruction of Jenin. It declares that American invaders of Iraqi cities should employ "overwhelming combat power" to capture or destroy targets with such "speed, firepower and shock" that resistance collapses.

Despite the war-mongering of the Bush administration and jingoistic propaganda of the media, there is deep and profound opposition among the people to war against Iraq.

However, the great task that confronts those participating in the October 26 demonstrations is to transform the widespread but confused opposition to war into a powerful socially-conscious political movement. Protests are important and necessary, to show the world that the American people do not support the predatory policies of the US government. But they are not sufficient.

The struggle against war requires more than moral outrage and personal courage. Those who are protesting against the war must first of all understand its underlying causes and, on the basis of such an understanding, develop a program upon which a mass movement against war can be based.

The planned invasion of Iraq is an imperialist war. In the final analysis, the same corporate economic interests that determine the policies carried out within the United States stand behind its military actions overseas.

American imperialism is the global expression of the class interests pursued by the most powerful sections of the capitalist class within the United States. Class privilege has reached the point where the entire society is ruled by a plutocracy. According to the most recent figures, for example, the richest 13,000 families in America have nearly as much income as the 20 million poorest households. Those 13,000 families have incomes 300 times that of average families. Over the past thirty years, moreover, the average real annual compensation of the top 100 CEOs has gone from \$1.3 million—39 times the pay of an average worker—to \$37.5 million, more than 1,000 times the pay of ordinary workers.

Along with the concentration of wealth has come a profound decay in the traditional forms and institutions of American democracy. Democracy cannot, in the end, survive in a society that is so starkly divided along economic lines. The great mass of the people—the working class—has been systematically excluded from any real participation in political life, as the two parties have emerged ever more openly as the defenders of the wealthy and the super-rich.

This is what accounts for the absence of serious political differences between the two parties of the corporate elite—

the Democrats and Republicans. On all vital questions of “national interest,” i.e., the global interests of the capitalist class, the two parties find common ground.

The Democratic Party has voted to give George W. Bush—who became president through political fraud—unprecedented war-making powers. The hands of Daschle, Gephardt and their congressional cohorts are as blood-stained as those of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld.

There is no greater mistake than the belief that the Democratic Party is an alternative for working people to the Republicans. This is a crucial political lesson of previous anti-war movements. The mass movement against the Vietnam War ultimately and tragically failed to halt American militarism because it lacked a viable political perspective. Illusions in the Democratic Party kept the mass opposition to the war safely within the channels of capitalist politics and the two-party system.

Within a few years of the end of the Vietnam War, the corporate elite and its two parties launched an offensive against the working class, marked by union-busting, wage-cutting and crippling reductions in social programs on the one side, and huge tax breaks for big business and the rich on the other. As a result, social inequality has returned to levels not seen since the 1920s.

Meanwhile, just below the surface of daily life, the anger and indignation of the masses, which can find no reflection in the political superstructure, grows ever more intense.

It is to this great social force—the American and international working class—that opponents of imperialist war and militarism must turn: a force that is potentially more powerful than the capitalist ruling elite.

The millions of men and women who work in the factories, offices, schools and hospitals, who depend for their survival on their paychecks and salaries—this colossal force has not been heard from, because it is excluded by official society and the two-party system. The mobilization of the working class—independent of and against the Democrats and Republicans, and in opposition to the entire system of class privilege—must become the foundation for the development of an international movement against militarism and imperialist war.

The struggle against war must be linked to a social program that addresses the burning issues of jobs, living standards, education, health care and housing, and fights for the defense and extension of democratic rights. Its central commitment must be the fight for social equality.

The Socialist Equality Party of the US and our co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International have developed the *World Socialist Web Site* as the political and intellectual instrument for the construction of such a movement.

We offer the following principles for the building of a mass movement against imperialist war:

- 1) The mobilization of the working class as the central and leading force. This is where those who have come to Washington and other cities to demonstrate must turn to build a viable anti-war movement. Not to the Democrats, to the European imperialists or to the treacherous national bourgeois leaders in the Third World countries.
- 2) Internationalism as the guiding political and organizational principle. The struggle against imperialist war must be conceived of and conducted as a struggle to unify the working class of all nations, races and religions against the common enemy. It must oppose all attempts to divide the working class.
- 3) The political independence of the working class. The subordination of working people in the US to the Democrats must be ended. It is necessary to build a new political movement—the Socialist Equality Party in the US and the Fourth International around the world—to unite the American and international working class against imperialist war, militarism and social inequality.

The central weapon for building this movement is the *World Socialist Web Site*. We urge all those dedicated to the struggle against imperialist war to contact the WSWS. Contribute articles, download and distribute our statements, help widen our readership. Join the SEP and help make it the new leadership of the working class.

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