

The struggle against war requires a break with the Democrats

By the Editorial Board
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Thousands of people will converge on Washington, DC, this Saturday to express their opposition to the war in Iraq and their outrage over the Bush administration's decision to escalate that war in defiance of the November election's popular mandate for a withdrawal of US troops.

The burning political question posed by the repudiation of the will of the people on such a fundamental question is what political perspective is necessary to wage a successful struggle to end this war and to prevent even bloodier interventions—against Iran, Syria and countries as yet unnamed—being prepared by the administration.

The answer to this question given by those who have called the January 27 protest is clear. Their perspective is that the war in Iraq can be halted by pressuring the Democratic Party to utilize its new majority status in Congress to de-fund the war and force the administration to bring US troops home.

This outlook is clearly expressed by the leadership of the main coalition organizing the demonstration, the United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) coalition, which has invited several Democratic members of Congress to deliver speeches from the platform and is urging demonstrators to stay in Washington to participate in "Congressional advocacy visits."

In its call for the demonstration, the UFPJ urges those opposed to the war to "Tell the new Congress: act NOW to bring the troops home!"

The statement continues: "We call on people from every congressional district in the country to gather in Washington, DC—to express support for those members of Congress who are prepared to take immediate action against the war; to pressure those who are hesitant to act; and to speak out against those who remain tied to a failed policy..."

A similar outlook is expressed in the Nation, the flagship publication of the left-liberal protest milieu oriented toward the Democratic Party. An editorial in its January 29 issue entitled "No to Escalation" engages in wishful thinking regarding the capacity of the congressional Democrats to wage a struggle against Bush's deployment of another 21,500 troops to Iraq.

"Even if Congress is ultimately unable to prevent the troop increase, a series of hearings, votes and resolutions can confront the President on his strategy and can lay the groundwork for the larger battle of ending the war," the Nation declares. The editorial urges participation in the January 27 demonstration on the grounds that "ratcheting up the pressure on Congress is urgent."

It is now nearly four years since massive protests against the looming war in Iraq brought tens of millions of people into the streets all across the world. It is high time for some hard but essential political lessons to be drawn.

Those demonstrations, despite their massive scale, failed to halt the US war of aggression against Iraq. Repeated demonstrations since have not diminished this crime.

On the contrary, the death toll has risen to a horrifying level, with an estimated 650,000 Iraqis and more than 3,000 US troops having lost their lives, and the world has watched in horror as atrocities like Abu Ghraib, Fallujah and Haditha unfolded.

Protest in and of itself will not alter the policy of those who launched this war. The indifference to public opinion of those who control the White House has become inescapably clear with Bush's "surge" in the wake of the midterm elections.

The Democratic Party has acted as the administration's willing accomplice in launching and continuing this war. In October 2002, the Democratic-controlled Senate passed the authorization for the use of military force resolution granting Bush a blank check to carry out an unprovoked war against Iraq. This was not a mistake or aberration. It was the culmination of a deliberate policy of the Democratic leadership to ignore the broad antiwar sentiment among Democratic voters and keep the administration's war drive out of the 2002 midterm election campaign. Thus, the Democrats served as the enablers for the war conspirators in the Bush administration.

During the 2004 primaries, mass antiwar sentiment was channeled behind candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination—in particular, Howard Dean. The party leadership scuttled Dean's candidacy and threw the nomination to Senator John Kerry, who had voted for the war and vowed to continue it, criticizing Bush for failing to send in enough troops.

Democrats have voted nearly unanimously every year since 2003 to grant the administration massive war funding that now totals nearly \$8.5 billion a month.

And what of the new-found Democratic antiwar fervor supposedly reflected in the nonbinding Senate resolution opposing Bush's "surge"? As the text of this resolution makes clear, the Senate Democrats—together with some Republican allies—begin not from a determination to end the war, but rather a concern that Bush's proposal will provoke mass opposition, making it harder to defeat the Iraqi resistance.

The very first passage of the resolution warns, "United States strategy and presence on the ground in Iraq can only be sustained with the support of the American people and bipartisan support from Congress."

Those backing the resolution voice concern that the administration's course is weakening the "war on terror." They worry that not enough American troops are available for new wars—against Iran, Syria, North Korea or Venezuela. These same Democrats are the most enthusiastic proponents of expanding the military and have called for doubling the ranks of the Special Forces, the Army's elite killing squads.

The differences between the congressional Democrats and the Republican administration are over tactics, not strategic aims. When the Democratic leadership calls for “redeploying” American troops in Iraq, they mean keeping tens of thousands of soldiers and Marines there in heavily fortified bases and utilizing US air power to repress Iraqi resistance.

The Democrats do not oppose aggressive war or colonial occupation. They backed the invasion of Iraq because they thought it would enable the US to grab the country’s oil resources and establish US hegemony in the Middle East. They are critical of Bush’s war policy now not because the war is imperialist or illegal or because it has killed hundreds of thousands of people. They are critical because the war has gone badly.

The Democrats, like the Republicans, are controlled by a financial oligarchy that is determined to utilize US military force to offset the decline of American capitalism’s economic power. This campaign of military aggression will not end with Iraq. Preparations for war against Iran are already well advanced, and mounting global tensions raise the nightmarish prospects of a global conflagration.

A successful struggle against war is impossible outside of confronting the system that creates it, a system that is subordinated entirely to profit and the piling up of vast personal fortunes for a tiny elite. Those who claim that this can be accomplished by pressuring the Democrats and Congress are either fooling themselves or deliberately deceiving others. So long as mass protests are oriented toward this perspective, they will serve not as a means of changing society, but merely of venting popular frustration.

The struggle against war requires the independent political mobilization of working people—the ones who are paying the price for war—against the profit system.

Demonstrations, as well as any other form of political activity, can help achieve this goal only to the extent that they are aimed at raising the political consciousness of broad masses. They must serve to educate working people, students and youth about the source of imperialist militarism within the capitalist economic system, and about the role of the Democratic Party and the two-party system as political instruments of a financial elite whose interests stand in direct opposition to those of workers in the US and all over the world.

The demands for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and for those responsible for this war to be tried for war crimes must be joined with a far-reaching program aimed at the reorganization of economic life, ending poverty and social inequality, and breaking the domination of the banks and corporations by transforming them into public utilities.

Such a program can be developed and fought for only through the emergence of a new political movement forged through an irrevocable break with the Democratic Party and fighting for the independent mobilization of working people in their own political and social interests.

We urge all those who are looking for a real way to stop the slaughter in Iraq and who want to end social inequality and political reaction to read and support the *World Socialist Web Site* and join the Socialist Equality Party and the International Students for Social Equality in the struggle to build a new mass socialist party.

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