An open letter to Michael Moore

28 September 2004

Film-maker and writer Michael Moore, whose anti-war and anti-Bush film Fahrenheit 9/11 *has been seen by more than 20 million Americans, is conducting a national tour of campuses to encourage young people to vote for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry in the November election. He is currently making appearances in Michigan. The following open letter to Moore was written by Jerome White, the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for the US House of Representatives from Michigan's 15th Congressional District, which includes Ann Arbor, the home of the University of Michigan. The letter is also available in* PDF format.

Dear Michael Moore,

This week you have begun a tour of states across the country with the aim of encouraging students and young people to vote for John Kerry in the November elections. You write in a letter to supporters that your "Slacker Uprising Tour" will "try to convince the fed-up, the burned-out, and the Nader-impaired to leave the house for just a half-hour on November 2nd and mark an "X" in a box...so that America and the world can be saved." Later you make clear that that the "X" should be marked for Kerry.

I must say, Mr. Moore, your open campaigning for John Kerry comes as a disappointment to many of us who greeted with appreciation the production of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Your film has justifiably won the admiration of millions of people across the United States and internationally who find in it an expression of their own opposition to the war in Iraq and the brutal policies of the American government.

However, the best aspects of *Fahrenheit 9/11* stand in sharp contradiction to the attitude you are taking to the presidential elections.

Some of the most moving parts of your documentary explore the social divisions in this country, as they are expressed in your hometown of Flint, Michigan. You demonstrate that the war is being waged in the interests of corporations and the ruling elite. You demonstrate that the devastating consequences of the war are borne not only by the Iraqi people, who continue to face daily bombings, horrible living conditions and the brutality of a foreign occupation, but also by ordinary working class Americans, who are forced to kill and be killed in the name of an unjust and illegal act of aggression.

You end the film with a quote from George Orwell that amounts to an indictment of social inequality and the capitalist system: "The hierarchy of society is only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance...The war is waged by a ruling group against its own subjects, and its object is not victory...but to keep the very structure of society intact."

To recognize that the underlying cause of the war in Iraq lies in the acute social antagonisms within the United States must bring with it certain political conclusions—in particular, the recognition that a viable and effective opposition to the war requires the building a movement opposed to "the structure of society," that is, the structure of the capitalist system which is responsible for war. The conclusion flows logically from the premise. How, then, does this resolve itself into calling for a vote for John Kerry?

As I am sure you are well aware, John Kerry and the Democratic Party represent no challenge to the structure of American society. Yes, there are differences between the Democrats and the Republicans, but these differences are not of a fundamental character.

The Democratic Party, no less than the Republican Party, is a party of big business and a defender of social inequality. It does not speak for ordinary working people and youth. It is by no means an anti-war party, as the record of the Clinton administration and Kerry's own positions make clear.

On the latter point, you praised Kerry in the first speech of your tour for finally raising serious criticisms of the Bush administration's handling of the war in

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Iraq. “In the last couple of weeks,” you said, “Kerry has stopped listening to the wrong people and he’s listening to himself and he’s being himself.” In relation to Kerry’s vote for the resolution authorizing war with Iraq, you counsel the American people to “give Kerry a break” and accept that he has changed.

However, from Kerry’s own statements, it is clear that he, no less than Bush and the Republican Party, supports the occupation of Iraq. The growing opposition in Iraq to the American military and its stooge regime is cause for concern within the ruling elite, a concern that is reflected in the Kerry campaign. But there is no talk of an end to the occupation.

Kerry, like Bush, refers to the legitimate resistance of the Iraqi people to US military occupation as “the enemy” and labels the insurgents as “terrorists.”

To the extent that Kerry has suggested he might withdraw some American troops within four years time, he has made such suggestions conditional on securing an adequate number of forces from other countries to take the place of Americans in repressing the Iraqi population.

Kerry has said nothing about the ongoing brutal bombardment of Iraqi cities and has not come out in opposition to the preparations under way for a massive campaign to retake cities such as Falluja. He has said nothing because he is not opposed to this policy, and has continually emphasized that his administration will seek to build “stability” in Iraq. This can only mean the mass slaughter of thousands of Iraqis in order to secure American domination of the country.

As you are well aware, the Democratic Party and the Kerry campaign are involved in a systematic, nationwide effort to prevent third-party and independent candidates who oppose the war in Iraq from getting on the ballot. The targets of this attack include the Socialist Equality Party and Ralph Nader, among others.

This effort is no less anti-democratic than the efforts of the Republicans to suppress the votes of minority and working class voters in various parts of the country. Thousands of working people, poor people and youth who signed petitions to place SEP candidates on the ballot because they wanted an alternative to the two major parties have been disenfranchised by election authorities, who discarded their signatures in order to keep a socialist anti-war candidate off the ballot.

By giving your support to John Kerry and the Democratic Party, you are compromising both your principles and your own conscience.

It is not true that the greatest danger facing the American people is four more years of the Bush Administration. No, the greatest danger facing the American people is the failure to build a real opposition to the present social system, of which the Bush administration is merely one of the most malignant expressions.

Every election one hears the same refrain: it is necessary to support the Democratic Party in order to defeat the Republicans. And every time the task of building an independent party of the working class is put off. The consequence is entirely predictable: we are left with no alternative to the domination of the political system by the ruling elite.

There are no easy solutions, Mr. Moore. Easy solutions arise from easy problems, and, as you are well aware, the problems we face are exceedingly difficult. Through your serious work, you have justifiably earned a mass audience that looks to you for political guidance. This places on you a great responsibility to raise the level of political debate. You have the responsibility to seriously think through the tasks that confront us today and speak the whole truth to the American people.

I ask you to consider these issues very carefully. The most important step you could take now is to lend your voice to the efforts, such as those in which I and the Socialist Equality Party are presently engaged, to build a socialist alternative to the capitalist two-party system. Such a step—and only such a step—would be a serious advance in the struggle against war, injustice and inequality.

Sincerely,

Jerome White, Socialist Equality Party candidate for the 15th Congressional District, Michigan

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