Workers Must Oppose the Gulf War

Workers League
20 February 1998

1. This Special National Congress declares the opposition of the Workers League to the mobilization of US military forces in the Middle East and pledges all the efforts of the party to rally the working class against the bloody crimes being prepared by US imperialism. The Bush administration is preparing to launch an imperialist war against Iraq, a small and underdeveloped country whose entire history bears the scars of its bitter heritage of colonial domination. So naked are the predatory aims of the Bush administration that it is not even attempting to disguise the economic interests motivating its war drive with the traditional hypocritical references to the defense of "democracy" and "freedom." The semifeudal sheikhdoms, emirates and monarchies with which the United States is allied are all reactionary dictatorships in which vast oil-based wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few hundred royal parasites who invest their billions in American, European and Japanese banks. Chattel slavery existed legally in Saudi Arabia until 1962 and its unofficial practice remains widespread until this day — along with other barbaric practices like beheading for adultery and the infliction of mutilation as punishment for petty crimes. Neither the Bush administration nor the warmongering capitalist press refer to either the political character or historical origins of the Persian Gulf states, all of which were arbitrarily created by imperialism for the express purpose of dividing the Arab masses and maintaining control over the region. The indisputable fact is that the US government is preparing to wage a war for the profits of the banks and oil companies. This criminal enterprise must be resolutely and unequivocally opposed by the American working class.

2. In an orgy of chauvinistic warmongering, the Bush administration and the capitalist press are attempting to portray Iraq as a modern-day equivalent of imperialist Nazi Germany and Saddam Hussein as the reincarnation of Adolf Hitler. What a mockery of historical truth! It is Iraq, not the United States, which is threatened with invasion, conquest and annihilation by the massive military machine of an imperialist power bent on establishing its undisputed control over the region. In fact, a war against Iraq, whose population is less than one-fifteenth of the United States and which possesses a relatively primitive military force, would assume a genocidal character. The *Wail Street Journal* has openly stated that the United States should launch a war against Iraq in order to destroy "Arabism" in the Middle East, a goal which for its realization would of necessity require the extermination of millions of Arabs.

3. The Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait merely provided the United States with a pretext for the implementation of' its longstanding plans to intervene militarily in the Persian Gulf and seize control of its vast oil reserves. The "Carter Doctrine" and "Reagan Corollary" established the principle that military force would be used to maintain American control over the Persian Gulf. Numerous military exercises, from the initial establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force to the provocative naval "reflagging operation" of l987-88, served as dress rehearsals for the present operation. It is already obvious that the aims of the military intervention go far beyond the defense of the feudal Saudi dictatorship and even forcing the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The United States is establishing a permanent and massive military garrison in the Persian Gulf which is to become a virtual American protectorate. To achieve this aim, it is determined to destroy any potential political and military resistance to the interests of US imperialism. That is why the capitalist press and politicians are openly speaking of the need to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein, crush the Iraqi military, occupy Baghdad and install a US general as proconsul who would rule the country as MacArthur ruled Japan after World War II.

4. The invasion of the Middle East by more than 100,000 US troops, backed by tanks, naval warships and hundreds of planes, has historical implications that go far beyond the Persian Gulf. It is a watershed in world politics. It marks the beginning of a new imperialist redivision of the world, aimed at imposing a new form of direct colonial rule in those former colonial (and semicolonial) countries which won nominal independence after World War II. This eruption of ferocious aggression against weak and backward countries cannot be explained as the product of the criminal intentions of individual leaders in the major capitalist centers. It expresses, rather, the economic and political essence of imperialism: that is, the domination of' the world economy by finance capital.

5. So great is the crisis of imperialism that it must sweep away all restrictions on its ability to exploit the backward countries. The drive for markets, sources of raw materials and access to "cheap" labor requires the reannexation of vast portions of the globe. British, French, German, Japanese and Italian imperialism, as well as lesser powers such as Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, are all participating in the US-led onslaught on Iraq because they regard it as the first step to restoring their own positions as colonial masters in Asia, Africa and Latin America. At the same time, the Zionist regime in Israel is goading its imperialist patrons to launch a military strike against Iraq, hoping that the outbreak of full-scale war will provide it with an opportunity to drive millions of Palestinians out of the West Bank and into Jordan. The Zionists would then complete their annexation of the West Bank and implement their plan for a vast resettlement of immigrants from the USSR.

6. Despite the initial unity of the imperialists against Iraq, their attempt to plunder the resources of the Middle East will inevitably provoke intensifying conflicts between the major powers. A principal purpose of the US intervention is to give US imperialism a stronger position in the ongoing struggle for markets and profits against its major rivals, above all Japan and Germany, by establishing a permanent military presence in the region which provides the bulk of world oil supplies. The invasion of the Middle East is thus the first stage in the eruption of a new interimperialist world war, the third of this century, which threatens the destruction of mankind in a nuclear holocaust. The driving force of this war is the same as that which resulted in the slaughter of tens of millions in World War I and World War II — the private ownership of the means of production and the division of the world into rival capitalist nation-states.

7.The political responsibility for this war rests not only with the leaders of world imperialism, but with their lackeys in the Stalinist bureaucracies which rule the Soviet Union and China. The long-planned US military intervention in the Persian Gulf could not have been set into motion in August 1990 without the agreement of the Soviet bureaucracy, in the joint communiqué of Baker and Shevardnadze, followed by the open support

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of' the Soviet Union and China for a series of UN Security Council resolutions against Iraq. In pursuit of their policies of restoring capitalist property relations, the bureaucracies headed by Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping have abandoned any pretense of opposition to imperialist domination of the semicolonial countries. By sanctioning a colonial war in the Persian Gulf. they are opening the door to further acts of imperialist banditry, and ultimately, to the dismemberment and colonial subjugation of both the Soviet Union and China. Joining this betrayal of the elementary principles of anti-imperialist solidarity is the regime of Fidel Castro, which either voted in favor or abstained on all the crucial UN Security Council resolutions which provided the United States with a legal pretext for its aggression against Iraq.

8. The role played by the so-called United Nations in the present crisis has thoroughly exposed this institution as nothing less than a clearinghouse for imperialist intrigue and oppression against the backward countries. One has only to compare the speed with which the United Nations has imposed the present blockade against Iraq with the utterly ineffective and insignificant sanctions imposed against the truly criminal regime of South Africa and, in an earlier period, against Rhodesia. Israel has blithely defied UN resolutions and maintained control over Jerusalem and other territories it seized from the neighboring Arab states in 1967, but the United Nations has never proposed the dispatching of aircraft carriers and warships to blockade Haifa, Eilat and Tel Aviv.

9. The support for US military intervention and UN sanctions by Egypt, Syria and other Arab bourgeois regimes reveals the bankruptcy and historical dead end of bourgeois nationalism. After decades of empty proclamations of "Arab unity" against Zionism and foreign imperialist domination, these bourgeois regimes have enlisted as the Arab stooges and front men for a war of colonial plunder waged by US imperialism. Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution has once more been confirmed: the national bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries is incapable of achieving national unification or genuine liberation from imperialist domination. These tasks can only be carried out by the working class. through the struggle for the United Socialist States of the Middle East, with equal rights for Arab. Jewish. Iranian. Kurdish and Turkish workers.

10. The Workers League's defense of Iraq as an oppressed country in no way implies political support to Saddam Hussein and the Arab Baath Socialist Party. On the contrary, the unconditional defense of Iraq against US imperialism means that the Workers League defends Iraq despite our longstanding opposition to the regime and policies of Saddam Hussein. The Workers League neither supports nor attributes any progressive character to his decision to invade and annex Kuwait. However, our criticism of this annexation is based on an internationalist and proletarian program, which assigns to the working class — not any of the existing bourgeois regimes — the tasks of unifying the oppressed masses of the Middle East and abolishing the reactionary state borders established by the old colonial masters. On the basis of this same socialist perspective, the Workers League rejects all demands for the reestablishment of the Kuwaiti state, an enclave established by British imperialism and preserved by US imperialism as part of the postwar settlement which carved up the Middle East and insured continued imperialist domination of the oil resources of the Persian Gulf. The Workers League opposes the invasion not because it represents "aggression" against Kuwait, but only because it cannot, even if successful, contribute to the democratic unification of the Arab masses and their liberation from imperialism.

11. Bitter historical experience has proven that the unification of the Arab masses requires, as its precondition, the establishment of the hegemony of the working class in the democratic and anti-imperialist struggle. The answer to the problems of the Arab people, including the demand of the Palestinian masses for genuine self-determination, cannot be achieved by sporadic and opportunistic border wars. Saddam Hussein seeks not to unify the Arab nation and destroy the imperialist order in the Middle East, but merely to strengthen the position of the Iraqi bourgeoisie against its local rivals as well as its imperialist masters. It has a ready been revealed that Saddam Hussein's recent "peace in initiative" included a secret codicil that offered to recognize the state of Israel — that is. to betray t he Palestinians in exchange for US recognition of the annexation of Kuwait.

12. The eruption of the war crisis in the Middle East is a vindication of the perspectives of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Workers League, and above all, of the Marxist analysis of the significance of the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The International Committee has insisted that the breakdown of the Stalinist regimes represents a crisis of the entire postwar order through which the global interests of imperialism were maintained for nearly half a century. The IC stated that the events in Eastern Europe, arising out of the pressure of the world economy on the obsolete nation-state system, were part of a general collapse of the international equilibrium which had regulated the affairs of imperialism. A new equilibrium could not be achieved without a protracted period of political and social convulsions. Moreover. the IC has warned that the American ruling class, having lost its position of economic supremacy, would seek to use its residual military strength to defend its worldwide domination.

13. The invasion of the Middle East is an expression. not of the strength of US imperialism, hut of its desperate crisis. Even in the heyday of its postwar power, in the 1960s, the United States did not have the resources to sustain indefinitely the war in Vietnam. Today, with the federal government bankrupt and the US financial system in shambles, the decision to dispatch a massive military force to the most politically volatile region in the world has the character of a colossal adventure. As the Workers League declared in its statement on the US invasion of Panama: "This combination of economic weakness and military power is an explosive mixture. But in the long run, the first factor is far more decisive. and the increasing recklessness in the use of American military power means that inevitably, US imperialism is headed for a monumental debacle."

14. Imperialist war in the Persian Gulf will mean an immense escalation of attacks by the ruling class on the living conditions and democratic rights of the working class in the United States. The Bush administration, with the full support of the Democratic Party leadership in Congress, will impose upon the working class the full costs of the war. Unlike the Vietnam War period, the Bush administration is unable to carry out a program of "guns and butter." Not only will tens of thousands of working class youth face death in the sands of the Middle East, their class brothers at home will see social programs wiped out to pay for the cost of the war, strikes and other forms of trade union action outlawed and millions driven into poverty. Even before the military operation began, American capitalism was unable to afford social programs to alleviate the most hideous expressions of poverty such as mass homelessness, widespread illiteracy and malnutrition, and infant mortality rates in the major cities that rival those in the most oppressed backward countries. Now, with the occupation of Saudi Arabia already costing $72 million per day, the Bush administration and Congress are agreed that even more drastic reductions in social expenditures are necessary. Thus, millions of workers will see the connection between imperialist war and the destruction of their conditions of life. The principal institutions through which the bourgeoisie maintains its ideological and political domination — the trade union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party, the capitalist media — will be completely identified with the imperialist war and utterly discredited.

15. The Workers League warns that the outbreak of imperialist war will be accompanied by an assault on the democratic rights of the working class and its organizations unprecedented in the history of the United States. Workers should take serious note of the conspiratorial manner in

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which the US intervention was orchestrated by Bush, who once served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. As the *New York Times* reported on August 19: "In only 15 days while Congress was scattered on summer recess and much of official Washington was on vacation, senior officials in the Bush administration have committed the United States to its broadest and most hazardous military adventure since the Vietnam War." Without protest from the capitalist media, a degree of censorship has been imposed upon the reporting of US military activity in the Persian Gulf that is far more stringent than anything that existed even at the height of World War II.

16. The ruling class does not for a moment believe the falsified prowar polls produced by the capitalist media. It *knows* that mass sentiment. however passive and disorganized it is at the present moment, will turn explosively against the government as the social consequences of the war hit home. Among the main "lessons" drawn by the bourgeoisie from the Vietnam debacle is that domestic political dissent must not be permitted to undermine the military operations of American imperialism. This rule will be applied with the utmost brutality when it becomes clear that the social base of antiwar sentiment in the United States will be tens of millions of workers, rather than middle class students in the universities. During the 1980s, in the course of "peacetime" industrial struggles, the government and the employers have resorted to strikebreaking, union busting, legal frame-ups. jailings and even murder. These methods will be expanded and intensified under war-time conditions in which the struggles of the working class to defend its living standards will be viewed by the government as "unpatriotic" and harmful to the "national unity."

17. The task of the Workers League is to intervene aggressively to expose the nature of imperialist war and mobilize the massive discontent which it will produce on the basis of an independent class strategy, and provide this mass opposition with a revolutionary leadership and socialist program. Our work will be based on the principles of revolutionary defeatism elaborated by the founders of our movement. We tell the working class that its enemy is not Iraq and its people, but the American ruling class and its government: that it must oppose the war drive of the American bourgeoisie with all its might; that if war breaks out, the working class must continue to oppose it and develop its independent class struggle in opposition to all appeals for patriotic sacrifice. We declare:

- Not a man and not a penny for the imperialist war!
- No sacrifices for the war machine! Defend jobs and living standards!
- Withdraw all US military forces from the Middle East!
- Intensify the class struggle against the capitalist ruling class which is responsible for the war.

18. The antiwar strategy of the Workers League is based on the independent political mobilization of the working class against imperialism. In opposition to imperialist war, we fight for the international unity of the working class, the building of a Labor Party based on socialist policies, and the establishment of a workers government. The Workers League rejects all attempts by various middle class radical organizations to subordinate popular antiwar movements to bourgeois politicians and to confine the social protests produced by war to the single issue of US military actions in the Persian Gulf. Capitalism is the cause of war and, therefore, the struggle against war is inseparable from a struggle against the capitalist profit system. One of the greatest political lessons of the Vietnam War is that the struggle against imperialist war requires the mobilization of the working class, independently of and in opposition to the capitalist parties, and that it must be linked to every struggle of the working class to defend jobs, living standards and social services. To fight war means to fight for the international unity of the working class. socialism and the ending of capitalism.

19. Within this political framework, the demand for the formation of a Labor Party, based on a revolutionary program aimed at establishing a workers government, assumes the greatest practical significance. From the first hours of this crisis, all the leading representatives of the Democratic Party, from Ted Kennedy and Jesse Jackson to Sam Nunn, proclaimed their solidarity with the Bush administration. As in all previous imperialist wars undertaken by the United States — from the Spanish-American War in 1898 through World War I, World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam — the bipartisanship of the Democratic and Republican parties has meant joint collaboration in the defense of the interests of Wall Street. In order to fight imperialist war, the working class must break with the two war parties of big business and construct its own Labor Party.

20. This political struggle presupposes a ruthless struggle to drive the pro-imperialist AFI-CIO bureaucracy out of the trade unions. Lane Kirkland, Owen Bieber, Richard Trumka are stooges of big business's war machine. They welcome war as a means of whipping up chauvinism, promoting their reactionary trade war policies, and intensifying, in the name of patriotism and national defense. their corporatist collaboration with the employers and the government. We call on workers to reject the chauvinism of the bureaucracy and all its malignant forms of expression. The labor movement must steadfastly oppose all anti-immigrant hysteria, especially that being directed against people of Middle Eastern origin living in the United States. Where necessary the trade unions should organize defense guards to protect the neighborhoods and homes of immigrants threatened by fascist vandalism.

21. In advancing the demand for a Labor Party, the Workers League raises specific demands aimed at mobilizing the working class against the imperialist war drive. We call for the nationalization of the arms industry under workers control and its conversion to socially useful production: the nationalization of the oil industry; the nationalization of the banks and the confiscation of war profits. All these demands have as their aim the systematic political mobilization of the working class for the conquest of state power.

22. The US drive to war in the Middle East will place the greatest political and practical responsibilities on every member of the Workers League. The members of the Workers League must stand firm against enormous social and political pressures, including direct state repression. The lessons of the Smith Act trial of 1941, when 18 leaders of the Trotskyist movement in the United States were framed up and convicted of sedition on the eve of World War II, must be reviewed and assimilated. In keeping with the transformed conditions created by war, every member and the party as a whole must develop the greatest political sensitivity on all matters relating to security. Be on guard against provocateurs and informers! It is essential to review all the existing forms of work and discard those which are incompatible with the tasks posed by war.

23. While barred from membership in the Fourth International by the reactionary Voorhis Act, we share the political aims of our cothinkers in the International Committee and fight for its principles in the center of world imperialism. The Workers League bases its struggle against imperialist war on its scientifically grounded-confidence in the revolutionary role of the working class. Our methods are those of political agitation and education aimed at developing the class consciousness of American workers. We reject all petty-bourgeois methods — such as conscientious objection, draft resistance, or anti-military sabotage — which substitute the actions of isolated individuals for the systematic political mobilization of the working class on the basis of' a socialist program. Only by placing power in its own hands, dismantling the institutions of the capitalist state, and creating its own democratic forms of rule can the working class put an end to the threat of war and all the social evils produced by the profit system.

24. The struggle against war requires patient, energetic and determined political activity within the working class and the youth. Our aim must be to fuse the growing social struggles of workers and youth against the destruction of their living conditions with conscious opposition to

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imperialist war. We must explain tirelessly to workers that war and its horrors can be ended only through the building of the Workers League, in solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International, and the establishment of a socialist America as part of a United Socialist States of the World.

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